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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

DECEMBER 25, 1995

FOUNDED 1914
WASHINGTON, D.C.
ISSUE 4,223

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 213, Number 26, Issue 4,223, December 25, 1995. (Printed in the U.S. on December 6, 1995.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 9 & 16, July 17 & 24, Aug. 21 & 28, and Sept. 18 & 25, 1995) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. The New Republic Advertising Sales Office (212) 702-4882. Yearly subscriptions, $69.97; foreign, $99.97; Canada, $84.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling).

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(ISSN 0028-6583). Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, CD-ROM, issue and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Internet mail address: tnr@aol.com Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 602, Mount Morris, IL 61054. For subscription problems call 800-827-1289.

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CORRESPONDENCE

The classics

To the editors:

It's rewarding to see the burgeoning classical movement get a serious treatment in your magazine, in contrast to the tongue-in-cheek approach of *The New York Times* of February 9. However, you should not be surprised if those of us within the movement are not satisfied by how we were defined by Paul Goldberger in his review of Allan Greenberg's monograph ("Back to the Past, November 27).

I always come back to Leon Krier's definition of *classical* as signifying "the best" as the easiest one to defend; it says a lot without proscribing specific limits on what is "in" or "out." Goldberger was right in identifying a break between many of the younger and older generation of classicists but wrong in defining the newcomers as more dogmatic than their elders. In fact, I would say we were simply less prepared to compromise, because we had earlier in our education abandoned the modernist myth. People like Allan Greenberg and John Blatteau (architect of the State Department Dining Room) opened the door for us; they took the shame out of rejecting modernism. If classical really is the "best," then we are more rigorous about striving for the best without compromising it by what is less than ideal.

Edwin Luytens, who Goldberger acknowledges as one of Greenberg's greatest influences, is too idiosyncratic an architect to build a new renaissance upon; if many young classicists instead emulate ancient Greece and Rome (or in my case, Venice and Florence), we are adhering to a longer, and philosophically more consistent, tradition. Which is not to say there isn't a certain stick-in-the-mud attitude among some neo-Greqs. But adhering to principle does not mean, as Goldberger suggests, abandoning creativity.

Finally, there is nothing inconsistent in believing classical work to be both "populist" and "elitist" (it is a uniquely American problem of Goldberger's to be troubled by such a paradox); indeed, a fundamental appeal for most of us doing this kind of work is that it does have a diverse audience, who appreciate it at the level for which they are prepared. Which might explain why this is not just an architectural movement, but a general uprising in all the arts, painting, sculpture, poetry and music included, something "Back to the Past" ignored.

DAVID T. MAYERNIK
Brooklyn Heights, New York

To the editors:

Paul Goldberger salutes me as the "spiritual father of the current classical revival" and then reprimands me for giving it "much of its narrow polemical tone." While it is true that, in *The Golden City*, I declare modern art DOA—a fact not an accusation—the central theme of my book, published in 1959 and still in print, is the prophecy that modern art, being dead, would inevitably give way to the classical tradition. The prophecy is being fulfilled, if somewhat slowly. For those interested I can only ask them to turn to *The Golden City*. They will discover that what upsets your reviewer is the prophetic, not the polemic of which there is little.

Goldberger sees himself, and a small band of architects working in the classical, as appreciating the "great aesthetic power that Modernism at its best could have," especially the work of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. For those of us who look beyond to the giants among architects, from Michelangelo to McKim, Mead & White, why bother with the Modernists? After all, we accept as a starting point that ornament is an ingredient of architecture, believing as did George Santayana that "a building without ornament is like heaven without the stars."

HENRY HOPE REED
New York, New York

DeLay tactics

To the editors:

In "The Contract With K Street," in the December 4 issue, John B. Judis stated that PACs associated with members of Project Relief, the antiregulatory coalition founded by Republican Representative Tom DeLay of Texas, increased their contributions to Republicans this Congress. They did indeed, but not by as much as reported.

During the first six months of 1995, these PACs gave Republicans $2.4 million, or 80 percent of their total contributions. In the first six months of 1993, they gave Republicans $1.4 million, or 52 percent of their total contributions.

NANCY WATZMAN
Washington, D.C.

Tax attacks

To the editors:

Your recent attack on the Republican tax cut plan ("Tax Evasion," December 4) cries out for response. The central theme

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of the article is that tax cuts are the same thing as pork-barrel spending, just ugly politics and lacking any economic rationale or philosophical context. A few points in response:

(a) Pork-barrel spending occurs when government takes money from one person and gives it to another. A tax cut occurs when the government reduces the amount of money it is taking from someone.

(b) The editorial states that the capital gains provision violates the "principle that the government should leave economic allocation to the market." Capital gains taxes, however, represent an additional layer of tax on capital income, thus biasing economic choices against investment and distorting the market. If anything, Congress should be criticized for not eliminating this tax altogether.

(c) The editorial also attacks the IRA and estate tax provisions as some sort of special giveaway, yet these are also examples of the GOP trying to reduce the degree to which government interferes with private choices by double- and triple-taxing certain types of income.

(d) Finally, you state that a reduction of the wage subsidy known as the EITC represents a tax increase on the working poor. As welfare programs go, the EITC ranks highly because it subsidizes work rather than non-work and illegitimacy, but the vast majority of the program represents income redistribution to people who have no income tax liability to offset. Accurate use of language in Washington may be too much to ask, but reducing the amount of other people's money you give someone is not a tax increase.

There are plenty of special tax breaks in the law which grant favored status and special treatment to certain activities. If THE NEW REPUBLIC really wants to criticize hypocrisy, they should focus on those Republicans who oppose the flat tax, almost all of whom are motivated by a desire to protect those provisions (as well as their own ability to create new ones).

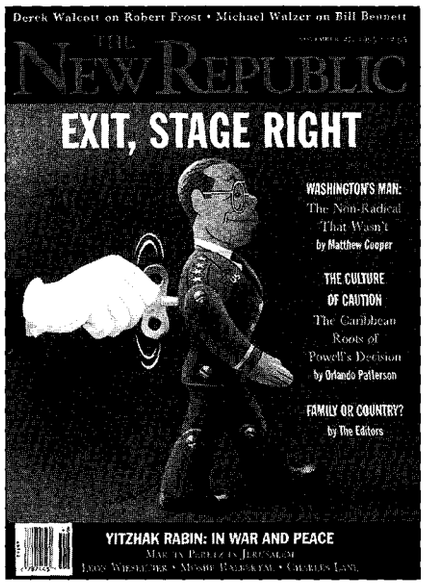
DANIEL J. MITCHELL
Senior Fellow, The Heritage Foundation
Washington, D.C.

Spy travel

To the editors:

Richard Pipes seems to have read Anatoly Dobrynin's memoirs with the extreme care it deserves, albeit selectively ("Beltway Commissar," November 27). As Dobrynin makes clear on page 35 after describing an enjoyable drive down the California coast with his wife, he "eventually visited all fifty states" as ambassador. Even leaving aside the accounts of Dobrynin's regular visits to New York City, Pipes therefore is incorrect in writing, "If he ever ventured outside the capital, Dobrynin does not think it worth recording."

The fact is that on his many trips Dobrynin discovered among Americans quite vocal anti-communist mistrust, which he first chronicles in a hilarious transcontinental train trip with Molotov, whose own suspicions surpass even those of your reviewer. But he also found among Americans a nonideological desire to get along somehow with this country's principal adversary and avoid war. These are not just minor points, since the gravamen of Pipes's assessment is that Dobrynin was a prisoner of the Beltway, and that if he had only gotten outside it he would have seen how much Americans mistrusted the evil empire.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The Caribbean Roots of Powell's Decision
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FAMILY OR COUNTRY?
by The Editors
YITZHAK RABIN: IN WAR AND PEACE

It is also quite understandable that Pipes found it difficult to accept Dobrynin's explanation that the Soviet Union collapsed of its own weight through piling Gorbachev's political blunders on top of years of misdirected and inadequate investment. Dobrynin specifically declined to swallow the Weinberger-Pipes thesis that Ronald Reagan and the economic might of the United States armsraced the Soviet Union to death. Historians of Pipes's eminence no doubt will have the last word on this controversy in years to come, but right now he must be regarded, like Dobrynin himself, as one of the participants submitting their own evidence.

LAWRENCE MALKIN
New York, New York

To the editors:

In his review of Anatoly Dobrynin's memoirs, Richard Pipes says that I "leaked to Dobrynin the contents of a confidential cable from the Moscow Embassy." He attributes this information to Dobrynin, with uncertain confidence.

For the record, I did not leak any classified information to Ambassador Dobrynin and would not have done so. Any information I communicated to the ambassador on this or any occasion would have been done under instruction.

Although Ambassador Dobrynin has a good memory and many journal notes to draw upon, his recollections are subject to human lapses and questions of interpretation. For example, he recalls that in my mission to Moscow in the period after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, "Shulman ... did not display the necessary perseverance in demanding to deliver his message to Brezhnev directly and returned to Washington without a reply." The fact is that I did not go to Moscow. Dobrynin had recommended against the mission, after consultation with Brzezinski.

MARSHALL D. SHULMAN
Sherman, Connecticut

Dear diary

To the editors:

Respect and gratitude are due Robert Alter ("The View From the Attic," December 4) for bravely debunking a by-now enshrined received idea. Anne Frank's *Diary*, however rightly cherished as brilliant and heartbreaking, cannot and does not provide a window on the enormity and the extremity of the Holocaust. If the appeal of the *Diary*, as Alter observes, is due largely to its "anodyne universalism," that very factor accounts more heavily for the enormous and enduring popularity of the Goodrich and Hackett stage adaptations. One of the many excellences of Lawrence Graver's *An Obsession with Anne Frank* is its generous treatment of Meyer Levin's more faithful dramatization of the *Diary*.

ELLEN SCHIFF
Adams, Massachusetts

Beyond

To the editors:

Robert Wright's statement ("Trading Places," December 4) that "A starving Mexican peasant may cross the Rio Grande and burden San Diego's social services," truly amazed me. I can readily visualize a starving Mexican peasant crossing the Rio Grande River to burden the social services of a number of Texas cities, El Paso, Loredo or Brownsville, but how he or she would burden San Diego's social services, a thousand miles to the west, is beyond my ken.

RICHARD L. JOHNSON
Colusa, California

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FROM WASHINGTON

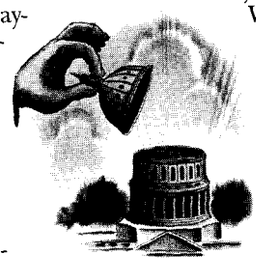
Just say no

In any future dissertation on the genre of magical realism, a chapter should surely be reserved for that gray document, Proximity Peace Talks. Unceremoniously staple-bound, printed in unformatted type, it's required reading for any understanding of Clinton's Bosnian adventure. In bland, bureaucratic prose, it promises things it cannot ensure, by parties who are mostly fiction, in defense of a state that no longer exists. Whatever blandishments the administration is now providing, this is the agreement that 20,000 American troops are now being sent to enforce.

Ignore, for a moment, the predictable absurdities of such a diplomatic contraption (my favorite, in a document that essentially decimates Bosnia's authority over two-thirds of its territory, is a detailed analysis of the composition of a future central bank)—and focus on the essentials. From its very first sentences, the agreement is a fantasy. Does anyone, for example, believe that there are two "entities" in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the agreement insists, rather than three? Or that the three will actually comply with a total exchange of "all combatants and civilians held in relation to the conflict ... no later than thirty days after the Transfer of Authority"? Or that all refugees will be able to return without "risk of harassment, intimidation, persecution, or discrimination, particularly on account of their ethnic origin..."?

Well I don't. The relation of Dayton to reality is about as direct as Bill Clinton's to honesty. In most peace agreements, of course, fudge is a sometimes necessary ingredient: as long as the parties have agreed to some kind of modus vivendi, the blather they have signed on paper can sometimes be glossed. But the trouble with Dayton is that no such modus vivendi exists in reality; if it did, no NATO troops would be necessary to enforce it.

The smoking gun of the document, however, is the central issue of rearming the Bosnians. Several leading administration officials, including Warren Christopher, William Perry and Al Gore, have all confirmed that the U.S. is committed to such an endeavor. *Newsweek* reports that the Bosnian prime minister, Haris Silajdzic, told Bob Dole's aides that in a secret meeting with Perry he was promised arms and training. It's likely that the congressional resolutions blessing the Bosnian expedition will include such a condition. And you can see why. Without it, the entire peace agreement is essentially partitioning Bosnia, creating a weak, rump Bosnian state, lifting sanctions against Serbia, allowing the Croats and Serbs to recuperate and quitting in a year's time to let them carve up the rest.



Would it be churlish at this point to ask what the Dayton peace agreement actually says? Scan it and you'll find no reference whatsoever to rearming the Bosnians. What you will find is Article IV in the "Agreement on regional stabilization" section. Within thirty days of the agreement being signed, Article IV stipulates, the parties will be obliged to enter into arms talks to bring about general disarmament. If they don't agree within six months, an automatic deal comes into force. This turns out to be quite a detailed plan. It maps out the future balance of armed forces in the region, according to a precise ratio, the baseline of which is 75 percent of the current level of Serbian arms. In the deal, Serbia will get 75 percent of that baseline; Croatia 30 percent; and "Bosnia" 30 percent. "Bosnia"'s 30 percent is divided two ways: two-thirds for the Croats and Bosnians; one-third for the Serbs.

So let's see. Unless I'm misreading the text, a rough calculation of this "balance" (which should be in force when the GIs leave) will tell you that Serbia (and its annex) will get 85 percent of its current arms level; Croatia (and its annex) 40 percent; and rump Bosnia 10. Dayton, in other words, is designed to ensure that what's left of Bosnia is *one-eighth* as strong militarily as its most aggressive neighbor. No wonder Milosevic signed! And would Tudjman, with four times the Bosnians' arms, rush breathlessly to their aid? As if.

Well, says Richard Holbrooke, if we don't arm the Bosnians, we'll allow others to do so. Has he read the document he created? Here's what it says: "All foreign forces, including individual advisors, freedom fighters, trainers, volunteers, and personnel from neighboring and other States, shall be withdrawn from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with Article III, paragraph 1."

Before any senator or congressman signs onto this, he should ask the president a simple question: Which parts of Dayton do you mean and which don't you mean? What's the real agreement and what's the phony one? And which one are American troops supposed to enforce: What they have in writing or what you've whispered into the ear of Mr. Silajdzic?

Don't expect a straight answer. In all likelihood, Clinton will resort to the only substantive point he made in his televised speech to the nation, which is that, for all its imperfections, Dayton at least ends the slaughter. What he won't say is that he personally sat by in the face of far worse slaughter, and that the bulk of it has, at least temporarily, abated. Indeed, when we froze the conflict for the sake of "peace," the victims were actually winning! Clinton will also argue that enforcing the agreement is necessary to ensure the credibility of the United States and the future of NATO, and that anyone who now undermines Dayton is effectively undermining America's place in the world. But this is tantamount to political blackmail. The Constitution clearly gives the Congress the right to tell a president he cannot deploy tens of thousands of troops without its consent. If Clinton didn't let the allies and the Balkan parties know this in advance, it's his fault, not the Congress's.

Clinton's final argument is the Lennonist doctrine that peace is always better than war. But peace is not always better than war. When the peace is morally and practically crippled; when American troops are put in the impossible position of both enforcing an agreement and then being told to subvert it; and when the deal will almost certainly lead in the long run to the final annihilation of Bosnia, it is far worse than the continuation of the conflict. At least then, with American support, the Bosnians would have a chance.

Dayton, in many ways, is an archetypal Clinton document. It lacks any fundamental moral core; it tries to obfuscate all the difficult choices; it's suffused with a lugubriously pious optimism; and it commits others to the consequences. No member of Congress with an ounce of conscience or common sense should acquiesce to it.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

DECEMBER 25, 1995

BIG GOVERNMENT, BIG BROTHERS

The key syllogism underlying this year's revolutionary rollback of the federal government's social welfare system is this: over the past thirty years, the condition of the underclass has worsened as Beltway social engineering designed to end it has expanded. Thus, reduce government meddling, and the condition of the poor will improve.

What this enticingly simple argument lacks is empirical data to back it up. Recently, even some prominent conservatives have argued that downsizing government is not synonymous with, and may in fact be detrimental to, rebuilding lives in the inner city. Senator Dan Coats and William Bennett wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that cutting government and reassigning federal responsibilities to states "is a necessary and not a sufficient condition of a strong civil society.... We should not ignore the potential for suffering, especially in our cities, when government retreats."

A new study underscores this point and suggests that the hard right's despair over the effects of government anti-poverty activism may stem more from its own prejudices than from an examination of the record. Press the pause button on *Boys Town* and consider the case of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. In 1995, Big Brothers/Big Sisters operated all across the country and maintained 75,000 active matches between adult volunteers and children. On average, the adult-youth pairs met for three to four hours three times a month for at least a year in what is the oldest, best-known and, arguably, most sophisticated mentoring program in America.

Well, what difference does it make? Public/Private Ventures, a policy research organization in Philadelphia, decided to find out. Their study examined 959 10- to 16-year-olds who applied to Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs in 1992 and 1993. Over 60 percent of the sample youth were boys; more than half were minorities, mainly black. Almost all lived with a single parent (the mother, in most cases). Over 80 percent came from poor households, 40 percent from homes with a history of substance abuse and nearly 30 percent from homes with a history of serious domestic violence. Half these youth were randomly assigned to a group, for which Big Brother matches were made or attempted. The other half were assigned to Big Brother waiting lists.

The results were startling. The addition of a Big Brother or Big Sister to a youngster's life for one year cut first-time drug use by 46 percent, lowered school absenteeism by 52 percent and reduced violent behavior by 33 percent. Participants in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program were significantly less likely to start using alcohol; less likely to assault someone; more likely to do well in school; and much more likely to relate well to friends and family. The effects held across races for both boys and girls.

These statistics contradict the conventional wisdom among many policy analysts, who insist that unless at-risk kids are touched by a caring hand before they graduate from kindergarten, as in Head Start, there's really nothing much that can be done. The Public/Private Ventures study suggests that disadvantaged children can be helped way into puberty. It is true that children and their families must volunteer for the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, and thus the program probably attracts participants who are already motivated. But even so, many children who have volunteered sit on an endless waiting list. Today it numbers roughly 30,000.

The responsible third alternative to both the government-designed bureaucracies favored by liberals and devolution strategies proposed by conservatives is government support to well-run, well-tested programs that work—like Big Brothers. Only with government support can such programs make a real dent in juvenile drug use, youth crime and other social problems.

Conservatives are right to stress the role of churches and other local institutions in responding to family and social breakdown. And liberals have grudgingly come to admit that, often, these private organizations do indeed provide services more effectively than Uncle Sam. But it is a tragic mistake, and one that most church and social workers would vehemently reject, to assume that the best thing government can do is to abandon the poor to the private sector. The funds simply aren't there.

The right should be pleased that private-sector initiatives, which for years they've hailed as the answer to poverty, are showing signs of success. Big Brothers/Big Sisters is a classic example. Now, if only they'll put their money where their mouths are. •

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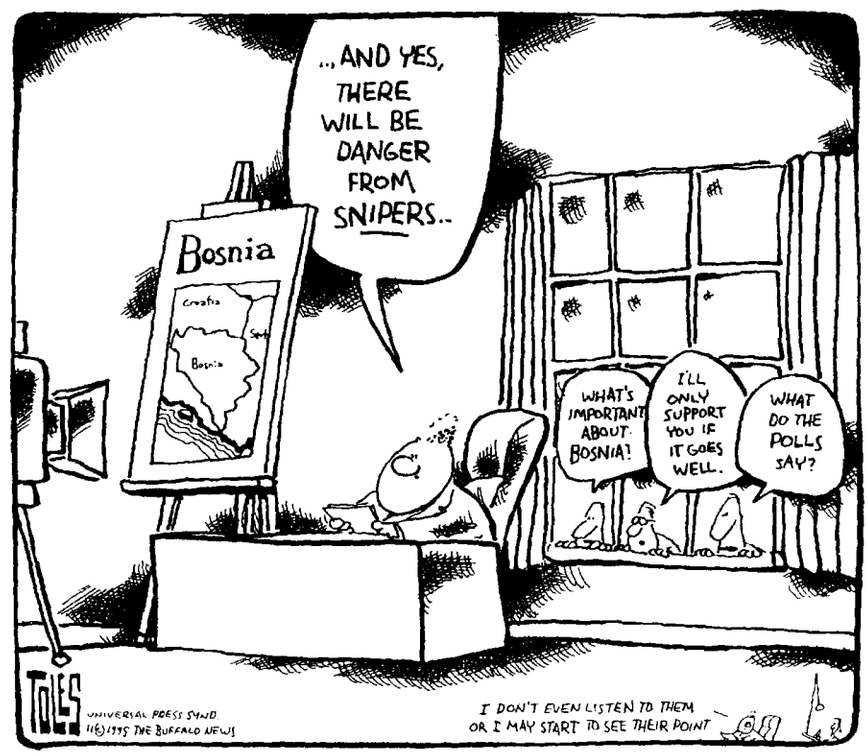
NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: In an MTV interview special, Tabitha Soren asked PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat, "You were quite a swinging bachelor?".... Washington, D.C., may have to suspend the city's instant lotteries because it is too strapped to pay its supplier of scratch-off game tickets.... South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond celebrated his 93rd birthday.... "New York Smells," a new collection of twenty-one scratch-and-sniff postcards, samples the city's odors, including Central Park grass, Fulton Fish Market fish and Big Apple garbage.... Tourists can now pay to play at a Russian military training camp in Vladivostok, where tank rides cost $200 per hour and firing a bazooka runs $700.... Needling Nebraska Governor Ben Nelson about his scheduled fund-raiser at La Colline, a Capitol Hill restaurant, state GOP Chairman Chuck Sigerson said, "Nothing against French culture, but we will know you have lost touch of your Nebraska roots if you host a Jerry Lewis film festival for your next fund-raiser."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UNIVERSAL PRESS SYND.
11/5/1995 THE BUFFALO NEWS
I DON'T EVEN LISTEN TO THEM OR I MAY START TO SEE THEIR POINT

DOCUDRAMA: In October of last year, soon after landing in Haiti, U.S. troops from the 10th Mountain Division entered the headquarters of the paramilitary Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH). They found "trophy photographs" of people that FRAPH had killed or mutilated while Jean-Bertrand Aristide sat in exile in the United States. Now it appears that American troops found something else as well: 60,000 pages of documents detailing the FRAPH's structure and activities during those murderous years. These documents, which allegedly identify arms caches still hidden throughout the Haitian countryside, are precisely what the Aristide government needs to disarm the thugs who still terrorize ordinary Haitians and what Haiti's Truth Commission, set to wrap up work this month, requires to prosecute the people who turned Haiti's cities into killing fields for much of this decade. Unfortunately, the U.S., which seized the documents last October, refuses to hand them over. Washington didn't even tell the Haitians it had the documents until an American judge exposed them several weeks ago. Caught red-handed, the Clinton administration now claims that it planned to offer the Haitians a peek all along but needed the last year to go through the files itself. And this, a spokesman claimed, took a long time because they're in French. Another U.S. official suggested that maybe it wasn't such a good idea to give the documents back at all, because once the murderers are revealed, "these documents might be used to target people." This, of course, is what they should be used for. The more information the Haitian authorities possess about what actually happened, the more credibly they can pursue due process against those accused and prevent brutalized Haitians from pursuing violent retribution. America's refusal to release the files has nothing to do with these excuses. Everyone from Port au Prince to Langley, Virginia, knows that U.S. intelligence set up FRAPH to counter what it saw as Aristide's dangerous radicalism. FRAPH's founder, Emmanuel "Toto" Constant, has admitted to working for the CIA. Administration officials suggest implausibly that they knew little of the terror that Constant and others were perpetrating with their money. It's a good bet that the FRAPH documents shed some light on the subject. The information is crucial if there is to be an honest discussion, both in Haiti and the U.S., about what both countries did during those terrible three years of Aristide's exile. Hand 'em over.

SELF-REICHOUS: Newt Gingrich couldn't stand being on the sidelines. After vowing to keep a lower profile, the Speaker made a speech before the American Medical Association that showed his flair for the histrionic and the vile. "There is a consistent effort on the left to discredit anybody in this society who's productive," Newt roared. "If you actually know something about jobs, you shouldn't have anything to say about job creation. Instead we bring in a Harvard college professor,

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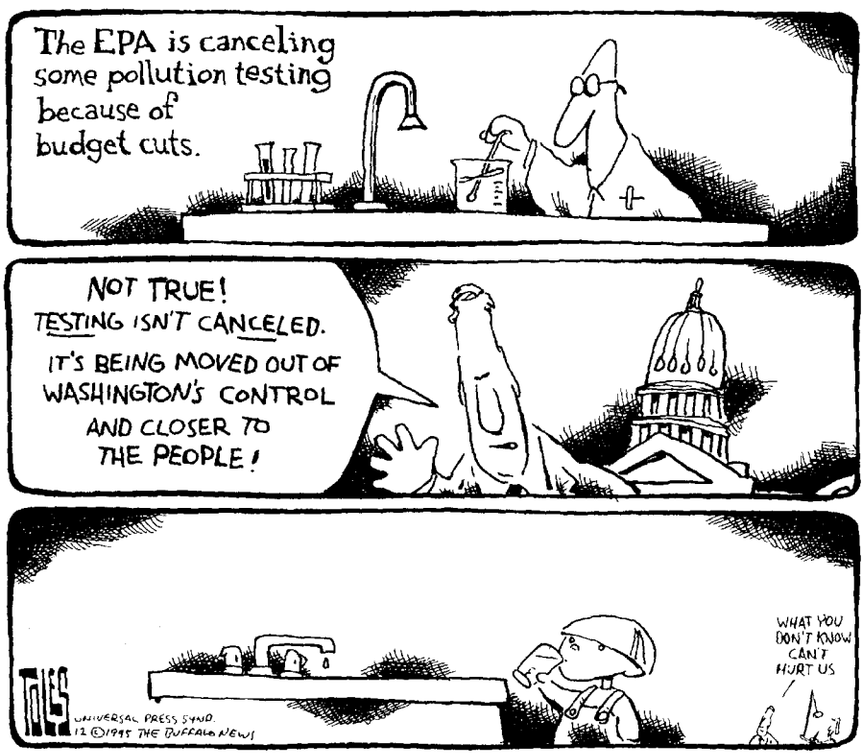
make him Secretary of Labor and allow him to tell the people who create jobs how they would create jobs if they were smart enough to get tenure at Harvard." Actually, Robert Reich was a non-tenured lecturer at Harvard (and before the Labor Department, a TNR contributing editor). And while he's got his faults, portraying him as some kind of Stalinist seems, well, just a tad overwrought. Suggestion, Newt: try the decaf and take a few more days off.

TAXMAN COMETH: On November 17, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit barred the Clinton Justice Department from participating in the notorious *Piscataway* reverse discrimination case. The case, you may recall, involves the firing of a white teacher over an equally senior black teacher to achieve proportional racial representation in the typing department of a New Jersey public high school. (See "Is Affirmative Action Doomed?" TNR, October 17, 1994.) The Bush Justice Department initially sided with Sharon Taxman, the white teacher, but last year, Deval Patrick, the head of the Clinton Civil Rights Division, inexplicably switched positions and asked to argue the other side. In denying Patrick's request to file a brief, the appeals court may have spared him further embarrassment. But in fact, his position had already been repudiated by the White House itself. In its report to the president issued last July, Clinton's Affirmative Action Task Force conceded that "Current law is evolving in this area, but two propositions are clear. First, layoffs cannot be used as a means to implement an affirmative action policy by 'making room' for new, diverse employees. Second, race or gender cannot trump a bona fide seniority system." Now that Patrick has been rebuffed by the courts and the president, isn't it time for him to confess error?


The EPA is canceling some pollution testing because of budget cuts.
NOT TRUE! TESTING ISN'T CANCELED. IT'S BEING MOVED OUT OF WASHINGTON'S CONTROL AND CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE!
WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW CAN'T HURT US
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UNJUST IMPEDIMENT: It would be tempting for those who oppose equal marriage rights for gay citizens to take solace from the recent decision of Ithaca, New York, to deny a marriage license to a gay couple. But they shouldn't. Ithaca Mayor Benjamin Nichols's somewhat idiosyncratic decision last summer to grant the license was bound to be struck down at some point by higher state authorities. The constitutional ground had not yet been prepared in New York state for a favorable decision; and it makes sense for pro-marriage advocates to concentrate their fire elsewhere, such as Hawaii, where the chances for equality are far brighter. Still, the advocates are going a little too far when they actually discourage people from applying for licenses, for fear it may lead to legal precedents against them. Equal marriage rights will only be gained by a sustained display of conviction that gay people actually want them. The most effective way of doing so is to apply, even when the case is hopeless, even when the backlash may be huge. As the early African American civil rights struggle shows, the only way past these barriers is through them. There's no clever or safe way around.

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER: "A judge who has bucked federal sentencing guidelines in crack cocaine cases, arguing that they discriminate against blacks, reluctantly obeyed a higher court's instructions last week and used those guidelines to sentence two brothers."

—The Associated Press, November 26.

(Thanks to Daniel Chait of Washington, D.C.)

DIETARY NEWS:

'Light' meals are lower in fat, calories

—*Huntington Herald-Dispatch*, November 30.

Alcohol ads promote drinking

—*The Hartford Courant*, November 18.

(Thanks to David Gray of Huntington, West Virginia, and Jeremiah Schreyer of Ellington, Connecticut.)

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ON THE HILL

CHEESE BIZ

By Stephen Glass

A former Bush administration aide calls it a "regulatory tragedy." A House committee staffer says "it's a fight for America's future." The bickering has become so intense that during a meeting between the two sides, Capitol police showed up after reports of threatening screams. The issue? Milk or cheese: an internecine Republican spat between self-described "skimmers" and "cheeseheads."

The war between the two lactose lobbies is, like most congressional wars, about government money. In late winter, Representative Steve Gunderson from the cheese state of Wisconsin urged the Agriculture Committee to redraft the nation's dairy regulations in ways helpful to cheese producers. He had a point: under the existing Agriculture Department regulations, cheese got something of a bad deal. The government sets the price milk processors must pay farmers; and milk turned into milk gets about 17 percent more than milk turned into cheese.

Why? The regulations date from the Great Depression, when farmers were restricted from selling milk outside their home region. This was primarily to prevent spoilage, since in pre-refrigeration days a few days on the road could bring more than a whiff to your lactose load. The upshot is that where cows are closer to big urban areas, like New York state, milk farmers have a captive market; where cows are miles from major populations, like Wisconsin, exporting milk is a losing proposition, so it gets turned into cheese.

New York farmers were further helped by a bizarre regulation called "the distance differential." Under this rule, the USDA requires processors to pay farmers more the farther their cows graze from Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Decades ago, this made sense since the Midwest's cows were more efficient, but with today's technology, they're no better than cows elsewhere. The distance differential means that New England farmers—who are farther from Eau Claire—get even more money for their milk.

Faced with this double whammy, Gunderson proposed increasing the minimum price for cheese. To butter up western members of Congress, whose support he needed, he also introduced a "powder tax." Western farmers produce much of the nation's powdered milk, and the new provision would have transferred money from both cheeseheads and skimmers to farmers whose raw milk gets powdered.

The trouble was that Gunderson was *increasing* agricultural handouts at a time of alleged government cutbacks. Getting the votes would have been impossible. And it's hard to think of a worse waste of money than milk subsidies: they cost consumers more than $1 billion a year in artificially raised prices. The government's purchase of excess cheese and dried milk costs taxpayers another $200 million plus.

So Gunderson went in the opposite direction: he introduced a "Freedom to Milk" bill that would totally deregulate the dairy industry. "When he couldn't help his own region within the old system, he did the truly moral thing for dairy," says Jonathan Tolman, who reviewed the programs for the Bush administration. But Gunderson had cheesier motives as well. Deregulation would also help cheese producers by allowing them to compete with fluid milk producers. It would tear down the prohibitions against selling milk across borders, opening the lucrative New York markets to Midwest farmers.

That did it. A group of New York Republicans, led by Representative Gerry Solomon and supported by dairy PACs, had a cow. Solomon claimed that deregulation would drive the price of milk so low that two-thirds of his state's dairy farmers would be forced out of business. The Gunderson faction labeled Solomon and company "skimmers," since the marketing programs skim money from consumers' wallets through inflated prices. Steve Eure, a lobbyist with the Milk Producers Federation and a Solomon ally, tried to milk the consumer argument: "Stability is what consumers are looking for. They'll be happy if a carton of milk costs the same each week." Solomon's press aide, Bill Teator, prefers to describe the government's regulations not as price fixing, but as "a systematic method of re-establishing the prices at appropriate levels."

On the cheese side, conservatives and consumer groups found themselves in an odd alliance with Gunderson. Every morning, and sometimes twice daily, cheesers talked at length in conference calls arranged by the conservative action group Americans for Tax Reform, which works to limit government subsidies. Although the skimmers initially won, stalling Freedom to Milk in the Agriculture Committee, the bill was reintroduced in the Budget Committee and easily passed the House. Some New York Republicans, like Representative Sherwood Boehlert, hinted they might vote against budget reconciliation altogether unless the milk program was preserved. As the atmosphere curdled, Agriculture Committee aides say Newt Gingrich promised Solomon, who chairs the powerful Rules Committee, that he would fix "the New York problem" in reconciliation.

In the Senate, however, the milk faction creamed the cheesers, keeping the current program with an added bonus: the Northeast Compact. This new program not only allowed the Northeastern states to regulate prices, but allowed the farmers—rather than the government—to set the price. And in a surprise end run, the powdered milk industry convinced the Senate to pass the powder tax.

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Members wrangled for days over the two diametrically opposed bills. Skimmers claimed that Gunderson, one of the top ten House recipients of dairy PAC dollars, had betrayed them. Cheeseheads argued that the skimmers were betraying the Republican revolution. Called in to resolve the dispute, Gingrich spent several hours on this single budget item, then gave up. Just before Thanksgiving, dairy reform was removed from the reconciliation bill. But Congress will have to look at the issue again before the dairy provisions expire next year. The Republican revolution was halted once again. Lobbyists, all together now: say cheese. •

TEL AVIV POSTCARD

AMIR ASSASSIN?

By Amir Oren

"While there is yet to be a pope in Jerusalem, we already have a Grand Inquisition—the Shamgar Commission." The reference is to the surprisingly aggressive investigation into last month's assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. The speaker is a highly placed member of the General Security Service (GSS), and if he sounds bitter, it is because the commission may very well be the first in Israeli history to draw blood against the previously sacrosanct Israeli Security Service.

It didn't seem that way at first. Using the Warren Commission as an example, Israeli law has, since the late '60s, authorized Israel's Chief Justice to name the members of a State Commission of Inquiry. In all previous cases (after the 1973 Yom Kippur debacle, the Sabra and Shatila killings of 1982 and last year's Hebron massacre) the Chief Justice has named himself commission chairman. The present Chief Justice, Aharon Barak, has a record of tough scrutiny of the intelligence agencies. But he broke with precedent, perhaps because of bad blood between himself and the Rabin family, and appointed not himself but his predecessor, Meir Shamgar, to the job. Shamgar, perhaps Israel's most respected public figure, reached the mandatory retirement age of 70 last August. And, in contrast with Barak, he's tended to defer to Israel's security forces.

In 1986, for instance, while Barak dissented, Shamgar voted to uphold a pre-emptive pardon by Israeli President Chaim Herzog of senior GSS personnel implicated in an execution and cover-up scandal dubbed the "Line 300" affair (after a hijacked bus). This despite clear evidence of GSS perjury. And the parallels between the body that investigated the "Line 300" affair and the newly appointed Shamgar Commission are striking. Both included a retired army general who was also a former chief of Israel's foreign-intelligence service, the Mossad, and an esteemed lawyer of Supreme Court caliber, in addition to the chairman himself.

The GSS may also have been buoyed by Shamgar's record as head of the commission that investigated the massacre in Hebron. That earlier Shamgar Commission stopped short of ousting any officeholders for their role in the security failure that allowed Baruch Goldstein to walk armed into the Tomb of the Patriarchs, where scores of Muslims prayed. It merely urged some organizational reforms.

After the Hebron massacre, the GSS convinced Justice Shamgar that Goldstein had acted alone, without official collaboration. And this "lone gunman" theory is the cornerstone of the argument that the GSS is now making to Shamgar about Yigal Amir. You can see why this is an important argument for the GSS. If Amir acted alone, what occurred on November 4 was a dismal *protection* failure. The service's Personal Protection Unit left Rabin's back exposed, they let Yigal Amir close in on his victim, press his Beretta against Rabin's jacket and fire point-blank, without even drawing a gun on him. Indeed, everyone associated with ministerial protection—the leaders of the detail, unit, operations branch and division—were immediately suspended, with the division chief asking for early retirement.

But a lone gunman, harboring secret designs within a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality, is virtually impossible to detect and, therefore, to intercept. If the commission buys the argument, it cannot accuse the GSS of an *intelligence* failure. And if there was no intelligence failure, then the buck could conceivably stop with the division chief responsible for protection. Blame would remain localized. The GSS chief himself—Israel's military censor allows only the publication of his initial, "C," as in Carl—would be spared.

A month ago, the GSS might have hoped its "lone gunman" theory would fall on receptive ears, but the argument has grown weaker by the day. While Yigal Amir may have acted alone that fateful night, this week's indictments suggest that his brother Hagai and their friend Dror Adani knew of his plans and helped him procure guns and explosives. Up to a half-dozen others, it now appears, were aware of the Amirs' activity to a lesser extent. The surprisingly harsh tone of the commission members' questions suggests that they're skeptical of the "lone gunman" argument, and that the GSS's early expectations of leniency may have been overly optimistic.

Ironically, C made his reputation as an expert on the fringe right. Under the administrations of Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, West Bank settlements spawned after the 1967 war by the radical group Gush Emunim became, according to the GSS chief at the time, "hotbeds of Jewish terrorism." In 1982, extremists threw a grenade into a rally protesting the war in Lebanon, killing Emil Greenzweig, a Peace Now activist. At the time, C headed the small GSS sec-

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tion on Jewish terrorism. In short order, C's unit grew into a branch and then a department, making him the in-house expert on "ideologically motivated lawbreaking on the extreme right within the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict," also the title of his Master's thesis in political science at the University of Haifa.

Rabin named C to head the GSS last February, at a time when right-wing extremism was once again on the rise. Demonstrations against the Oslo peace accords had grown violent. Rabin was vilified as a "traitor" and "murderer." C responded vigorously. He went out of his way to warn politicians and journalists that the threat of a political assassination—probably against Rabin—was real. Seeking better information about zealots capable of such an act, the GSS turned to Avishai Raviv. Depending on whom you believe, it either turned this Kahane bully into an informer (as the GSS informally admits) or invented and planted him on the right fringe as "the leader of Eyal," or Fighting Jewish Organization, as right-wing activists claim. The GSS hoped that by establishing this extremist group it could entice loners like Amir into an organization under its surveillance, where they could be watched.

Logical as it sounds, the plan failed. The informer, Raviv, befriended Yigal Amir, yet kept his case officers in the dark about Amir's plans to assassinate Rabin. The GSS maintains that Raviv was not a double agent, willfully misleading the GSS into a false sense of security. He was paid for his information and would have loved to sell such a gem, they argue, had he found out about it. But once the usually well-informed Amnon Abramovitz reported on national television that Raviv (code name "Champagne") had been in the GSS's employ, rumors about the GSS role in inciting the assassination spread. If, as some suggested, Raviv was a GSS "agent"—implying more than a mere "informer," perhaps implementing instructions rather than simply passing on tidbits—and if he took part in anti-Rabin demonstrations, including the one where Rabin was photomontaged as a Nazi, did it not follow that the GSS, with or without Rabin's knowledge, intentionally provoked the very atmosphere it warned might escalate into murder?

It took the police more than a week to deflate this balloon, as the two teenagers who produced the Nazi poster were arrested and found to have no connection with Raviv, but the damage was done. The seed of suspicion fell on receptive ground, and lives on: perhaps it was not just a matter of gross incompetence, with the GSS getting leads about "a man of slight build and Yemenite extraction planning to assassinate Rabin" and filing them away; perhaps there was some grand conspiracy. The Likud and its satellites, on the defensive for the first two weeks after the assassination, gained a reprieve.

The GSS, in short, is bearing much of the brunt of Israelis' search for blame in the wake of the assassination. And as the Shamgar Commission keeps the tragedy on the front pages, many Israelis are demanding that someone take ultimate responsibility for the security failure that night. The cruel irony is that the man ultimately responsible for the breakdown is Yitzhak Rabin himself. For many years, observers urged that the GSS be made responsible to particular cabinet officers, much as Britain's MI-5 reports to the Home Secretary and MI-6 to the Foreign Secretary. But these recommendations fell on deaf ears. Responsibility for their operations rested solely with the Prime Minister. Had Shimon Peres, or another dignitary, been killed, it is Rabin to whom all eyes would have turned.

Ultimately, however, the roots of this tragedy go deeper than the failures of any particular individuals. There is the Israeli mentality which elevates ingenuity at the expense of discipline (all bodyguards know that the exit from the vehicle and the entry into it are most vulnerable to a security breach, just as the take-off and landing are the most fragile stages in a passenger plane's flight), which means that Israeli commando teams are brilliant in executing surprise raids but lousy at defending high-value targets from similar treatment. There is also the lethal mixture of training and fanaticism—more and more Yigal Amirs are serving in combat and even in elite units, learning a deadly trade courtesy of the government they would undermine. Hagai Amir, a combat infantryman like his younger brother, was considered an explosives and electronics expert. His buddies nicknamed him "McGyver." McVeigh would be more like it. The Oklahoma City bombing saw a similar convergence of anti-government hatred and army training.

Unlike Lee Harvey Oswald, another serviceman turned sour, Yigal Amir has not been silent, nor silenced, since the assassination. The GSS must be thankful for this, since it deprived conspiracy theorists of grist for the mill. But Amir is learning fast. Throughout his first month in detention, whenever he was remanded to magistrate court, he would tell reporters that he acted alone, "perhaps with God," and that the police should stop hounding his acquaintances. But last Sunday, he recycled a rumor making the rounds (and denied by authorities) in Israel regarding the (apparently) unrelated suicide of a former GSS employee and challenged the media to report on "the Rabin bodyguard who was eliminated."

Public attention is now divided between the Jerusalem Commission hall and the Tel Aviv courthouse. The Amir trial looks like an open-and-shut case, the Shamgar inquiry, anything but. Once the commission notifies witnesses that its report may disapprove of their behavior, they will become targets for reprimand or resignation. Today, as it overcompensates with vastly tightened security, particularly around Peres, the GSS is showing its nerves. The Shamgar report will prove much harder to recover from than anyone would have expected.

AMIR OREN is a columnist for *Ha'aretz* in Tel Aviv.

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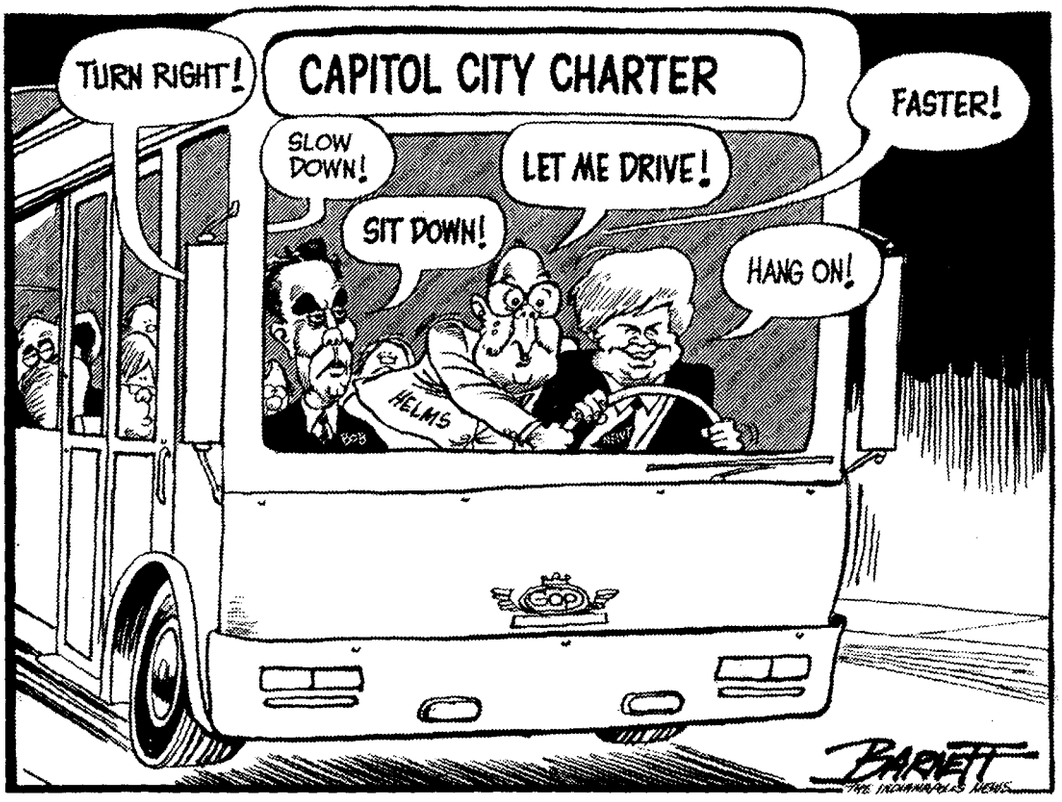

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SECRET SIX

By Matthew Cooper

While Bill Clinton was drawing applause on his recent trip across Ireland, his economic advisers—including Laura Tyson, Alice Rivlin and Gene Sperling—were secretly cobbling together a plan that would balance the federal budget in seven years. The proposal represented Clinton's third budget plan in ten months; and a few in the president's camp thought it was crazy to put such details forward. Why mess with success? The GOP slide in the polls has been astounding. But most Clintonites, especially Leon Panetta, thought it made sense to jump start the negotiations. The gambit seems to have worked. The atmosphere in the Capitol negotiating room is less tense, insiders say, even though some budget negotiators still get so agitated that they sound off without raising their hands, a violation of the negotiation's protocol.

Lloyd Bentsen, Clinton's ex-Treasury Secretary and once one of Congress's champion budgeters, sees the end in sight. "Both sides are in a position to declare victory," Bentsen said from his Houston office, although he's not delighted over all that will be in the final product. Taking a swipe at the GOP and his former boss, Bentsen says: "Those tax cuts should not be made."

Fat chance. Tax cuts, however ludicrous, are coming. What's less certain is when the final deal will come and how the parties will handle the three big obstacles to a resolution: Medicare, tax cuts and the conflicting economic forecasts of the administration and Congress. Clinton aides see the next few weeks as precarious. There won't be a deal, they predict, before the government is due to shut down on December 15. Then, a short-term resolution will keep the government running through the holidays. A Christmas breakthrough is possible but, more likely, the talks will go to January. Either a deal gets cut then or it waits until the election.

How will you know if a budget deal is imminent? As the weeks unfold, six issues, little publicized but very important, could change the budget deal:

Bob and Bosnia. The conventional wisdom is that the Bosnia deployment would hasten a budget deal, because it would temper the ability of the Democrats to lash out at a time when they need GOP support. But many in the White House think the deployment could delay a deal. Why? Bob Dole's support of the Bosnia deployment has brought the wrath of conservatives. Since he backed Clinton on Bosnia, Dole must hang tough on the budget. "It's got to make it harder," says one administration official.

The backdoor factor. By almost all accounts, the Consumer Price Index, used to calculate entitlements, overstates inflation. If the formula were to be recalibrated even slightly, it could have a huge effect on the budget. Of course, politicians of all stripes have known this for years, but they were too afraid to take it head on. Now the atmosphere is more brazen, and CPI readjustment will soon be on center stage. But if CPI is changed as the result of a backdoor deal, some Clinton advisers fear, it could boomerang on the negotiators. Seniors could revolt, not so much because of the cuts themselves, but because of the underhanded appearance of cutting benefits in a veiled way. That happened in 1988 when Congress passed its catastrophic care plan. "There's a lot of risk in this," says one Clintonite.

Eight is enough. In the Clinton White House, they're mightily dismissive of the so-called Party of Eight, the centrist politicians who have been holding telephone conference calls to discuss a possible independent presidential bid. "At least they've found work," quips a Clinton adviser. Indeed, it's pretty easy to be derisive of the cabal: losing presidential candidates Paul Tsongas, John Anderson and Gary Hart; former Congressman Tim Penny; ex-governors Lowell Weicker and Richard Lamm; and the nation's only sitting independent governor, Maine's Angus King. Still, they're likely to make some splash when they unveil their manifesto at a conference in Minneapolis this month. And the bigger it is, the more pressure will fall on the conferees to get a deal. Insiders say their plan will push radical deficit reduction—but not a balanced budget amendment. The bigger event will be Bill Bradley's January book tour. A review copy of his memoirs, *Time Present, Time Past,* is devoid of the kind of coy presidential hints found in Colin Powell's book. But friends of Bradley say that, like Powell, he will keep open the possibility of an independent bid during the tour. No, it won't be Powellmania. But Bradley's cavalcade could get a lot of press if the president and Congress are still fighting. Bradley allies who are planning the tour say he plans to make all the usual bookstore stops, but also to hold town meetings at community centers, churches and the like. It sounds a little staged, but it may look positively statesmanlike if Leon Panetta and John Kasich are still gritting their teeth come January.

The Tiny Tim option. Clintonites are watching the welfare bill for clues about where the budget is going. Clinton will veto the welfare bill that's temporarily stuck in a House-Senate conference committee. If Clinton takes a lot of heat for vetoing welfare look for him to cave sooner on the budget. But White House officials are buoyed by internal polls by Mark Penn and Doug Schoen showing that any bill—even long-awaited welfare reform—passed by the Gingrichites is now viewed with extreme

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

What's New?

American educators have always had a weakness for educational fads, and most teachers have seen many of these "innovations" come and go. But even veteran teachers are sometimes startled by the latest novelty. That was the reaction of retired teacher and special education supervisor Leon Schuchman when he saw his granddaughter's "New Age" report card, which, as he says, isn't a card and doesn't report. He describes it in a recent issue of *New York Teacher.*

"We took out a long sheet of paper that looked like an application for a mortgage."

In early November, our daughter, Linda, who lives with her family in Spokane, alerted us to the very exciting news that we soon would be receiving in the mail a copy of our eldest granddaughter's report card. She hinted that we would be pleasantly surprised by Katy's accomplishments in the first grade.

Wasn't it only yesterday that we held little Katy in our arms, playing with her, feeding her, laughing with her, and reacquainting ourselves with the fine art of diapering? And now she was a first grader....

Trembling, we opened the letter from Spokane. We took out a long sheet of paper that looked like an application for a mortgage. It had so many small squares, check marks, plus marks, and Xes, that we thought we would need a Guide for the Perplexed.

Today's modern report cards are neither reports nor cards. The Spokane Board of Education apparently has joined thousands of other school districts and has morphed (to use a trendy expression) the once familiar report into psycho-social evaluation babble, in which NO CHILD FAILS! This keeps the parents and teachers and school board and taxpayers HAPPY!

I looked at Katy's New Age report, which is now called The Academic Social Growth and Effort Indicator—TASGEI for short—and counted 54 attributes subsumed under a variety of curriculum areas. For each area the students are ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the best.

For example, a 1 means that the pupil is meeting the objectives and is performing skills independently in reading or in math or in work habits. A 4 (formerly called a D) indicates that the pupil needs more time to develop. A 5 (formerly an F) means that the "student chooses NOT to perform skills or activities!"

Had any of us brought home a report card in the good old days with a comment by the teacher that so-and-so "...did not choose to participate in arithmetic or in reading," he would have received direct instruction on parts of his anatomy!...

So far as Katy is concerned, we are happy to report that she was satisfactory in all the curriculum areas, with special pluses for being self-directed and for following directions, which pretty much covers the field.

On one of those 54 attributes mentioned above, the teacher noted that Katy has learned to form D'Nealian letters and figures. My wife and I looked at each other and thanked God that we were able to make it past the first grade back in the ancient days. We don't think we could have gotten an S in constructing those D'Nealian letters and figures.

Come to think of it, we don't know what the heck they look like! Do you?

* * * * *

But TASGEI is a timid innovation in comparison with what is going on in Alpine Valley school, a private school that opened this September in Edgewater, Colorado.

According to an article in *The Denver Post* (August 3, 1995), Alpine Valley has dispensed with curriculum, schedules, classes—the works. On a given day, if students "want to climb trees, read, bake a cake or learn physics, it's all OK and completely up to them." And this goes for long-term learning, too. If a kid doesn't feel like finding out how to read until he is 12, that's no problem. The same is true if a 5-year-old has an urge to learn algebra.

The idea is that children's learning should not be constrained; it is natural and will happen when the children are ready. "The school is based on freedom for the students," is how one of the founders puts it. It is also based on the idea that adults have no knowledge or experience that makes their ideas about what to learn and when to learn it any more valuable than their students'. It's no surprise that the kids get the deciding vote about who is going to teach them: "Every year at the annual school meeting, students and staff will—by majority vote—choose which teachers stay for another one-year contract."

Of course, Alpine Valley is a private school, and as such it does not have to adhere to the rules that govern public schools. But with voucher proposals and charter schools legislation, we could soon see taxpayers' money paying for innovative approaches to education that are just as far out, as well as others that are less loony but may be no more effective.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1995 by Albert Shanker.

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suspicion. Christmas helps, too. "We call it the Tiny Tim strategy," says one Clintonite. "They've picked the wrong month for burnishing their meanness credentials." A final welfare bill can be crafted, administration officials now believe, through "adjusters"—changes in the block-grant allocation formulas so that states have enough money.

The Speech. Forget about a December 15 shutdown. It won't happen. Clinton aides have their eyes focused on the State of the Union address in late January. The speech is seen as a huge weapon in the White House arsenal: an hour of prime time—okay, two in Clinton's case—that the president could use to berate Congress on the budget. "If that's what they want," laughs one administration official, "great."

The money pot. Ideally, the conferees will get around to tackling corporate welfare, a $90-billion-a-year money pot, according to Robert Shapiro, a contributing editor of TNR. Of course, as one Clintonite put it, "One man's welfare is another man's...." But cutting corporate welfare can help both sides out of the morass. It's fair and it's popular. If you see it get more press, you'll know that the budgeters are almost done. The question is which side will have the sense to figure it out first. •

Meet Austria's latest fascist.

SPANDAU SPANDEX

By Michael Z. Wise

When Europe marked the fiftieth anniversary of World War Two's end last spring, most politicians treated the triumph over Nazism as, just that, a triumph. But the continent's most successful far-right politician, Austria's Jörg Haider, sounded a discordant note, proclaiming, "In 1945, there were very few people who had reason to rejoice." Haider also drew a parallel between that time and ours, suggesting that the pillars of Austria's government are tottering again. He offered the assessment with ill-concealed glee, for Haider himself is shaking the foundations of a state that has already endured two cataclysms this century. The far rightist is intent on becoming Austria's next chancellor and building what he calls a Third Republic—and what some Europeans think sounds more like a new Third Reich.

Haider first gained international notoriety in 1991, when he was ousted as governor of the southern Carinthia province for praising Nazi labor policies. Yet he is unrepentant. Taken to task again in February for calling concentration camps "penal camps," he shot back, "I won't give in to the terror of virtue." Such inflammatory remarks earned him the label "yuppie fascist" in a European Parliament report on racism and xenophobia. "These people now wear Gucci shoes rather than jackboots, but the value they attach to democratic rules is crystal clear," leading Austrian commentator Hans Rauscher writes of Haider's associates. At the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, Haider's portrait hangs in a rogues' gallery alongside the French far rightist Jean-Marie Le Pen and Uganda's ex-dictator Idi Amin.

But Haider has demonstrated greater ability to attract mainstream voters than other European leaders of the far right. In nine years, Haider's Freedom Party has enlarged its share of the national vote from 4 to 22.5 percent, capturing forty-two out of 183 parliamentary seats in 1994.

Haider's best shot at power would come if the ruling, center-right Austrian People's Party swapped its alliance with the Social Democrats for a conservative bloc with him as government chief. The governing coalition's collapse after its failure to adopt a deficit-cutting budget in October may bring that goal within reach. Little more than a year after the last elections, voters will return to the ballot box on December 17. Polls suggest that Haider's Freedom Party may win as much as 27 percent. People's Party leader Wolfgang Schüssel has not ruled out a pact with the mercurial iconoclast.

Sporty good looks and a pugnacious charisma have turned Haider into a pinup populist. Viennese magazines regularly depict him bare-chested, preening in a bikini bathing suit, scaling rocky mountain faces or white water rafting. His daredevil plunge from a 315-foot-high bridge before thousands of cheering fans helped introduce bungee jumping to Central Europe. Amid all this exertion, Haider warned that Chancellor Franz Vranitzky had better start working out as well or "soon he won't be able to fasten his trousers." On another occasion he took aim at Polish President Lech Walesa's girth, calling the Nobel laureate "as wide as he is tall."

So when Haider turns up for an interview wearing skin-tight Spandex shorts patterned in hot purple, red and orange, the body-hugging outfit is calculated proof that the man of the hour is in top form. Casting across the Atlantic for inspiration, he proposes a "Contract with Austria" to drastically shrink the government. The rightward shift in Washington, he argues, puts him in a new light. "A trend is under way in America that benefits us," he says, citing his journey to the California-Mexico frontier last spring to inspect U.S. immigration controls. "It's certainly a bit shocking when one sees that an Iron Curtain is being built along the border of a free and open country."

Haider relishes parallels to his own call for an anti-immigrant crackdown. (He has campaigned on the slogan "Vienna Must Not Become Chicago.") Some 365,000 foreigners live legally in Austria, with a total population of 7.3 million. Haider estimates there are at least a quarter of a million more illegal immigrants.

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The Interior Ministry casts doubt on this figure. "We have relatively few foreigners in comparison with other Western European countries," says ministry spokesman Rudolf Gollia. "He exaggerates in order to ensure that the population sees problems where there are none."

Haider scoffs at suggestions that his party is a Führer-led movement repackaged for the postmodern era. "We are not Nazis," he says, turquoise eyes gleaming. Indeed, his success stems not so much from Austrian nostalgia for the Nazi era, a lingering if limited phenomenon with which he flirts dangerously, as from his cunning personification of anti-establishment attitudes. He blasts Austria's government as "a mixture of the Kremlin and the Vatican," likens its regulators to KGB agents and derides the National Bank as a modern-day "Sodom and Gomorrah."

This attention-getting blend of truths and distortions reaps support from resentful blue-collar workers and anxious retirees as well as entrepreneurs fed up with heavy state economic control. Soon after the war's end, Austria nationalized key industries and imposed obligatory membership in unions and economic "chambers." Membership in the two main parties gave access to a spoils system for jobs and housing. The system endures via constitutionally guaranteed party control of posts in state-held banks, insurance firms, schools and broadcast networks. There have been modifications, including some industry privatization. But, for the most part, the government has glossed over complaints about the system.

JÖRG HAIDER BY JOHN SPRINGS FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

As an advocate of democratization, Haider cuts a contentious figure. His own party originated in 1949 as a grouping that included thousands of ex-Nazis barred from the first election after Austria's liberation. For years the Freedom Party was led by Friedrich Peter, a wartime member of a Nazi S.S. Einsatzkommando murder squad. Still it defied simplistic definition as a neo-fascist organization, and its German nationalist wing was balanced by an influential group of free-market liberals. Many have since quit in protest at Haider's policies, or been forced out as he tightens his grip.

Though Haider's ambiguous remarks about the Third Reich have assured support from rightists, they have also alienated many Austrians who might otherwise back his calls for government reform. Recently, Haider has begun formally distancing himself from violence, anti-Semitism and racial hatred, even staging a visit to Washington's Holocaust Museum. Still, he seems unlikely to secure the broad respectability he craves.

Not for lack of trying. When I visited him at party headquarters near the Vienna State Opera, Haider had exchanged flamboyant Spandex for statesmanly gray flannel. And he stressed that the Freedom Party is striving for a more moderate stance and discarding its commitment to Austria's German ethnic identity. "We Austrians have now developed such a strong self-identity that we should not expose ourselves to misinterpretation," Haider told me. "I know very well what burden of conscience the Austrians and Germans have to bear due to the proceedings in the concentration camps. I am the last one who wants to whitewash or trivialize that."

But the old Haider continues to show through. His reference to concentration camp "proceedings" seems an odd euphemism for torture and genocide. Then there is the essay in the 1995 yearbook of his party's Political Academy suggesting that Jews instigated World War Two. When I ask about it, Haider responds, "There would be no need for us to publish a yearbook if we were to censor what individual authors think and do." Similarly, he brushes off a recent Gallup Poll for the American Jewish Committee that found widespread anti-Semitism and antipathy to other minorities among Freedom Party backers. "Our largest group of voters are those between 19 and 29 years of age, who I dare say don't even know what anti-Semitism is," Haider says.

A decade ago Haider rejected characterization of his party as a successor to the Nazis. "Because if it were," he asserted then, "it would have an absolute majority." Now he concludes our talk by issuing a disavowal of fascism's legacy that sounds both cynical and ominous. "We have made out of this traditional Freedom Party a modern reform movement that is no longer burdened by past history," he says. "We have a real function in Austria, and we cannot afford to carry around the weight of the past. The process is a long one, but it will succeed."

MICHAEL Z. WISE covered Central Europe for Reuters and as a special correspondent for *The Washington Post.*

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A counterblast in the war on Freud.

THE SHRINK IS IN

By Jonathan Lear

In an extraordinary decision, the Library of Congress this week bowed to pressure from angry anti-Freudians and postponed for as long as a year a major exhibition called "Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture." According to a front-page story in *The Washington Post*, some library officials blamed the delay on budget problems; but others contended that the real reason was heated criticism of a show that might take a neutral or even favorable view of the father of psychoanalysis. Some fifty psychologists and others, including Gloria Steinem and Oliver Sacks, signed a petition denouncing the proposed exhibit; as Steinem complained to the *Post*, it seemed to "have the attitude of 'He was a genius, *but*...' instead of 'He's a very troubled man, *and*....'" Though the library assured them that the exhibit "is not about whether Freudians or Freud critics, of whatever camp, are right or wrong," the critics refused an offer to contribute to the catalog or advise on the show.

Though this was perhaps the most blatant recent episode in the campaign against Freud, it is far from the only one. From *Time* to *The New York Times*, Freud-bashing has gone from an argument to a movement. In just the past few weeks Basic Books has brought out a long-winded tirade with what it no doubt hopes will be the sensational title *Why Freud Was Wrong*; and *The New York Review of Books* has collected some of its already-published broadsides against Freud into a new book.

In many cases, even the images accompanying these indictments seem to convey an extra dimension of hostility. "Is Freud dead?" *Time* magazine asked on its cover, Thanksgiving week, 1993. Whether or not this was really a question, it was certainly a repetition; for in the spring of 1966, *Time* had asked, "Is God Dead?". From a psychoanalytic point of view, repetitions are as interesting for their differences as for their similarities. With God, *Time* avoided any graven images and simply printed the question in red type against a black background, perhaps out of respect for the recently deceased. For Freud, by contrast, the magazine offered what was ostensibly a photograph of his face, but with his head blown open. One can tell it is *blown* open because what is left of the skull is shaped like a jigsaw puzzle, with several of the missing pieces flying off into space. The viewer can peer inside Freud's head and see: *there is nothing there.*

How can we explain the vehemence of these attacks on a long-dead thinker? There are, I think, three currents running through the culture that contribute to the fashion for Freud-bashing. First, the truly remarkable advances in the development of mind-altering drugs, most notably Prozac, alongside an ever-increasing understanding of the structure of the brain, have fueled speculation that one day soon all forms of talking therapy will be obsolete. Second, consumers increasingly rely on insurance companies and health maintenance organizations that prefer cheap pharmacology to expensive psychotherapy.

Finally, there is the inevitable backlash against the inflated claims that the psychoanalytic profession made for itself in the 1950s and '60s, and against its hagiography of Freud. Many reputable scholars now believe (and I agree) that Freud botched some of his most important cases. Certainly a number of his hypotheses are false; his analytic technique can seem flat-footed and intrusive; and in his speculations he was a bit of a cowboy.

It is also true that the American Psychoanalytic Association is a victim of self-inflicted wounds. In the original effort to establish psychoanalysis as a profession in this country, culminating in the 1920s, American analysts insisted that psychoanalytic training be restricted to medical doctors. The major opponent of such a restriction was Freud himself, who argued that this was "virtually equivalent to an attempt at repression." There was nothing about medical training, Freud thought, which peculiarly equipped one to become an analyst; and he suspected the Americans were motivated by the exclusionary interests of a guild. Freud lost: it was the one matter on which the American analysts openly defied the master. In the short run, this allowed the psychoanalytic profession to take advantage of the powerful positive transference that the American public extended to doctors through most of this century. Every profession in its heyday—and psychoanalysis was no exception—tends to be seduced by its own wishful self-image and to

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make claims for itself that it cannot ultimately sustain. In the longer run, though, psychoanalysis set itself up for revisionist criticism.

Yet, for all that, it also seems to me clear that, at his best, Freud is a deep explorer of the human condition, working in a tradition which goes back to Sophocles and which extends through Plato, Saint Augustine and Shakespeare to Proust and Nietzsche. What holds this tradition together is its insistence that there are significant meanings for human well-being which are obscured from immediate awareness. Sophoclean tragedy locates another realm of meaning in a divine world that humans can at most glimpse through oracles. In misunderstanding these strange meanings, humans usher in catastrophe.

Freud's achievement, from this perspective, is to locate these meanings fully inside the human world. Humans *make* meaning, for themselves and for others, of which they have no direct or immediate awareness. People make more meaning than they know what to do with. This is what Freud meant by the unconscious. And whatever valid criticisms can be aimed at him or at the psychoanalytic profession, it is nevertheless true that psychoanalysis is the most sustained and successful attempt to make these obscure meanings intelligible. Since I believe that this other source of meaning is of great importance for human development, I think that psychoanalytic therapy is invaluable for those who can make use of it; but, crazy as this may seem, I also believe that psychoanalysis is crucial for a truly democratic culture to thrive.

Take a closer look at the culture of criticism that has come to envelop psychoanalysis. You do not need to be an analyst to notice that more is going on here than a search for truth. Consider, for example, the emotionally charged debate over alleged memories of child abuse. No matter what side an author is on, Freud is blamed for being on the other. Jeffrey Masson, the renegade Freud scholar who believes that child abuse is more widespread than commonly acknowledged, made a name for himself by accusing Freud of suppressing the evidence in order to gain respectability. On the lecture circuit and in books like *The Assault on Truth* and *Against Therapy*, Masson has emerged as the most charismatic of the Freud-bashers, a self-styled defender of women and children against Freud's betrayals of them. Yet his critique of Freud is dependent on a willful misreading.

It is certainly true that at the beginning of his career, Freud hypothesized that hysteria and obsessional neurosis in adulthood were caused by memories of actual seductions in childhood. Because these memories were so upsetting, they were repressed, or kept out of conscious memory, but they still operated in the mind to cause psychological disease. By the fall of 1897, Freud had abandoned this view, which came to be known as the seduction theory. His explanation was that he had become increasingly skeptical that all the reports of childhood seduction—"not excluding my own"—could be straightforward memories. Masson, however, argues that this was merely Freud's attempt to fall into line with the prejudices of his German colleagues and thus to advance his career.

I find it impossible to read through Freud's writings without coming to the conclusion that it is Masson who is suppressing the evidence in order to advance his career. In fact, Freud never abandoned the idea that abuse of children caused them serious psychological harm, and throughout his career he maintained that it occurred more often than generally acknowledged. In 1917, for instance, twenty years after the abandonment of the seduction theory, Freud writes, "Phantasies of being seduced are of particular interest, because so often they are not [merely] phantasies but real memories." Even at the very end of his career, in 1938, Freud writes that while "the sexual abuse of children by adults" or "their seduction by other children (brothers or sisters) slightly their seniors" "do not apply to all children, ... they are common enough." It is, therefore, misleading to say that Freud ever abandoned belief in the sexual abuse of children. What he abandoned was blind faith in the idea that alleged memories of abuse are always and everywhere what they purport to be.

Besides, to focus on child abuse is to miss the point. What is really at stake in the abandonment of the seduction theory is not the prevalence of abuse, but the nature of the mind's own activity. In assuming, as he first did, that all purported memories of child abuse were true, Freud was treating the mind as though it were merely a recipient of experience, recording reality in the same passive way a camera does light. Though the mind might be active in keeping certain memories out of conscious awareness, it was otherwise passive. In realizing that one could not take all memory-claims at face value, Freud effectively discovered that the *mind* is active and imaginative in the organization of its own experience. This is one of the crucial moments in the founding of psychoanalysis.

Of course, there is a tremendous difference—both clinical and moral—between actual and merely imagined child abuse. But from the point of view of the significance of Freud's discovery the whole issue of abuse or its absence, of seduction or its absence, is irrelevant. Once we realize that the human mind is *everywhere* active and imaginative, then we need to understand the routes of this activity if we are to grasp how the mind works. This is true whether the mind is trying to come to grips with painful reality, reacting to trauma, coping with the everyday or "just making things up."

Freud called this imaginative activity fantasy, and he argued both that it functions unconsciously and that it plays a powerful role in the organization of a person's experience. This, surely, contains the seeds of a profound insight into the human condition; it is the central insight of psychoanalysis, yet in the heated debate over child abuse, it is largely ignored. In fact, the discovery of unconscious fantasy does not itself tilt

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one way or the other in this debate. Freud himself became skeptical about whether all the purported memories of childhood seduction were actual memories—but that is because he took himself to have been overly credulous. One can equally well argue in the opposite direction: precisely because fantasy is a pervasive aspect of mental life, one needs a much more nuanced view of what constitutes real-life seduction. Because fantasy is active in parents as well as children, parents do not need to be crudely molesting their children to be seducing them. Ironically, *Freud*'s so called "abandonment of the seduction theory" can be used to widen the scope of what might be considered real seductions.

The irony is that while those who believe in the prevalence of childhood seductions attack Freud for abandoning the cause, those who believe that repressed memories of child abuse are overblown blame him for fomenting this excess. Its real origins, though, are in "recovered-memory therapy," an often quackish practice in which so-called therapists actively encourage their clients to "remember" incidents of abuse from childhood. After some initial puzzlement as to what was being asked of them, clients have been only too willing to oblige: inventing the wildest stories of satanic rituals, cannibalism and other misdemeanors of suburban life.

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM PRESTON FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The consequences of believing these stories have in some cases been devastating. "As I write," Frederick Crews observes in *The New York Review of Books*, "a number of parents and child-care providers are serving long prison terms, and others are awaiting trial, on the basis of therapeutically induced 'memories' of child sexual abuse that never in fact occurred." But instead of giving Freud credit for being the first person to warn us against taking purportedly repressed memories of abuse at face value, Crews continues:

> Although the therapists in question are hardly Park Avenue psychoanalysts, the tradition of Freudian theory and practice unmistakably lies behind their tragic deception of both patients and jurors.

Crews, who is a professor of English at Berkeley and the éminence grise of Freud-bashers, acknowledges that his claim will "strike most readers as a slur." "Didn't psychoanalysis arise," he asks rhetorically, "precisely from a *denial* that certain alleged molestations were veridical?" Yes, it did. "It may seem calumnious," he writes later, "to associate the skeptical, thoroughly secular founder of psychoanalysis with the practices of Bible-thumping incest counselors who typically get their patient-victims to produce images of revolting satanic rituals." Yes, it does. But Crews is undeterred. He feels entitled to make this accusation, first, because Freud spent the earliest years of his career searching for repressed memories and, second, because Freud *did* suggest certain conclusions to his patients. That is, on occasion he took advantage of the charismatic position which people regularly assign to their doctors, teachers and political leaders and told patients how to think about themselves or what to do—sometimes to their profound detriment. Like most successful slurs, there is truth in each claim.

What is missing is the massive evidence on the other side. No one in the history of psychiatry has more openly questioned the veracity of purported childhood memories than Freud did. No one did more to devise a form of treatment which avoids suggestion. Looking back, I regularly find Freud's clinical interventions too didactic and suggestive. But the very possibility of "looking back" is due to Freud. It was Freud who first set the avoidance of suggestion as a therapeutic ideal—and it is Freud who devised the first therapeutic technique aimed at achieving it. Psychoanalysis distinguishes itself from other forms of talking cure by its rigorous attempt to work out a procedure which genuinely avoids suggestion.

This is of immense importance, for psychoanalysis thus becomes the first therapy which sets *freedom* rather than some specific image of human *happiness* as its goal. Other kinds of therapy posit particular outcomes—increased self-esteem, overcoming depression—and, implicitly or explicitly, give advice about how to get there. Psychoanalysis is the one form of therapy which leaves it to analysands to determine for themselves what their specific goals will be. Indeed, it leaves it to them to determine whether they will have specific goals. Of

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course, as soon as freedom becomes an ideal, enormous practical problems arise as to how one avoids compromising an analysand's freedom by unwittingly suggesting certain goals or outlooks. But if we can now criticize Freud's actual practice, it is largely due to technical advances which Freud himself inspired.

One might wonder: Why isn't Freud the hero of both these narratives, rather than the villain? Why doesn't Masson portray Freud as the pioneer who linked memories of child abuse with later psychological harm; why doesn't Crews lionize Freud as the first person to call the veracity of such memories into question? There are rational answers to these questions—in one case that he reversed his position, in the other that even though he reversed himself, he is responsible for a tradition—but neither of them are very satisfying. Rather, an emotional tide has turned, and reasons are used to cover over irrational currents. Part of this may be a healthy reversal, a reaction against previous idealizations. But it is also true that Freud is being made a scapegoat, and in the scapegoating process, nuance is abandoned.

To see nuance disappear, one has only to look at the supposed debate over the scientific standing of psychoanalysis. In a series of books and articles, Professor Adolf Grunbaum of the University of Pittsburgh has argued that psychoanalysis cannot *prove* the cause-and-effect connections it claims between unconscious motivation and its visible manifestations in ordinary life and in a clinical setting. Grunbaum argues correctly that Freud made genuine causal claims for psychoanalysis; notably, that it cures neurosis. But Grunbaum goes on to argue, much less plausibly, that in a clinical setting psychoanalysis cannot substantiate its claims. It is remarkable how many mainstream publications—*Time, The New York Times, The Economist* to name a few—have fallen all over themselves to give respectful mention to such abstruse work as Grunbaum's. Mere mention of the work lends a cloak of scientific legitimacy to the attack on Freud, while the excellent critiques of Grunbaum's work are ignored.

There is no doubt that the causal claims of psychoanalysis cannot be established in the same way as a causal claim in a hard-core empirical science like experimental physics. But neither can any causal claim of any form of psychology which interprets people's actions on the basis of their motives—including the ordinary psychology of everyday life. We watch a friend get up from her chair and head to the refrigerator: we assume she is hungry and is getting something to eat. We can, if we like, try to confirm this interpretation, but in nothing like the way we confirm something in physics. Of course, we can "test" our hypothesis by asking her what she is doing, and she may correct us, telling us that she is thirsty and getting something to drink. But it's possible that she's not telling us the truth. Indeed, it's possible, though unlikely, that she believes that the refrigerator is capable of sending messages to outer space, which will save the world from catastrophe. We cannot *prove* that our ordinary interpretation is correct. At best, we can gather more interpretive evidence of the same type to support or revise our hypothesis.

What are we to do, abandon our ordinary practice of interpreting people? If we want to know what caused the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, why there is a crisis in the Balkans, what were the origins of the Renaissance, how slavery became institutionalized, we turn to history, economics and other social sciences for answers. No historical account is immune to skeptical challenge; no historical-causal claims can be verified in the same way as a causal claim in physics. But no one suggests giving up on history or the other interpretive sciences.

Meaning is like that. Humans are inherently makers and interpreters of meaning. It is meaning—ideas, desires, beliefs—which causes humans to do the interesting things they do. Yet as soon as one enters the realm of meaningful explanation one has to employ different methods of validating causal claims than one finds in experimental physics. And it is simply a mistake to think that therefore the methods of validation in ordinary psychology or in psychoanalysis must be less precise or fall short of the methods in experimental physics. To see this for yourself, take the following multiple-choice test:

> Question: Which is more precise, Henry James, in his ability to describe how a person's action flows from his or her motivations; or a particle accelerator, in its ability to depict the causal interactions of subatomic particles?
> Answers: *(a)* Henry James
> *(b)* the accelerator
> *(c)* none of the above

You do not have to flip to the end of the article or turn the page upside-down to learn that the answer is *(c)*. Actually, a better answer is to reject the question as ridiculous. There is no single scale on which one can place both Henry James and a particle accelerator to determine which is more precise. Within the realm of human motivation and its effects, *Portrait of a Lady* is more precise than a Peanuts cartoon; within the realm of measuring atomic movements, some instruments are more precise than others.

If psychoanalysis *were* to imitate the methods of physical science, it would be useless for interpreting people. Psychoanalysis is an extension of our ordinary psychological ways of interpreting people in terms of their beliefs, desires, hopes and fears. The extension is important because psychoanalysis attributes to people other forms of motivation—in particular wish and fantasy—which attempt to account for outbreaks of irrationality and other puzzling human behavior. In fact, it is a sign of psychoanalysis's *success* as an interpretive science that its causal claims cannot be validated in the same way as those of the physical sciences.

How, then, might we set appropriate standards of confirmation for causal claims in psychoanalysis? This genuine and important question tends to be brushed aside by the cliché of the analyst telling a patient who disagrees with an interpretation that she is just resisting. The apotheosis of this

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cliché can be found in Sir Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, in which Popper argues that psychoanalysis is a pseudo-science because its discoveries cannot be falsified: what counts as evidence is too large and elusive for the total claim of the discipline to be either checked or challenged. Of course, in this broad sense nothing could "falsify" history or economics or our ordinary psychological interpretation of persons, but no one would think of calling these forms of explanation pseudo. And there *is* something that would count as a global refutation of psychoanalysis: if people always and everywhere acted in rational and transparently explicable ways, one could easily dismiss psychoanalysis as unnecessary rubbish. It is because people often behave in bizarre ways, ways which cause pain to themselves and to others, ways which puzzle even the actors themselves, that psychoanalysis commands our attention.

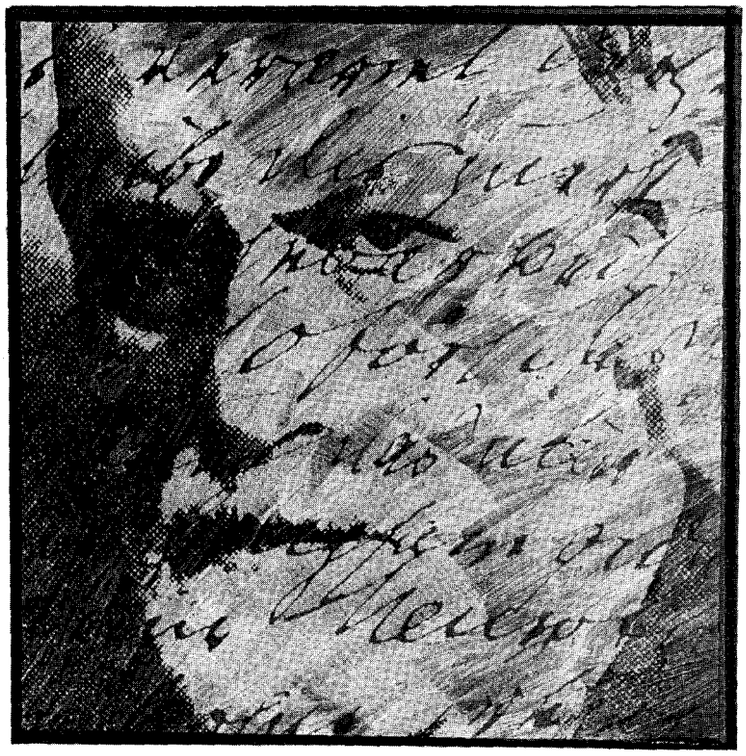

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM PRESTON FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Unfortunately, there is some truth to the cliché of the analyst unfairly pulling rank on the analysand. Would that there were no such thing as a defensive analyst! Yet I believe that when psychoanalysis is done properly there is no form of clinical intervention—in psychology, psychiatry or general medicine—that pays greater respect to the individual client or patient. The proper attitude for an analyst is one of profound humility in the face of the infinite complexity of another human being. Because humans are self-interpreting animals, one must always be ready to defer to their explanations of what they mean. And yet, suppose just for the sake of argument that it is true that humans actively keep certain unpleasant meanings away from conscious awareness. Then one might expect that any process which brings those meanings closer to consciousness will be accompanied by a certain resistance. It then becomes an important technical and theoretical problem how to elicit those meanings without falling into the cliché, without provoking a massive outbreak of resistance, and all the while working closely with and maintaining deep respect for the analysand. We need to know in specific detail when and how it is appropriate to cite resistance in a clinical setting, and when it is not. Some of the best recent work in psychoanalytic theory addresses just this issue.

Consider this elementary example: an analysand may come precisely five minutes late every day for his session. For a while, there may be no point in inviting him to speculate about why. Any such question, no matter how gently or tentatively put, might only provoke a storm of protest: "you don't know how busy I am, how many sacrifices I make to get here," and so on. Even if the habitual lateness and the protests *are* examples of what analysts call resistance, there is one excellent reason not to say anything about it yet: the analysis is for the analysand. Any interpretation that he cannot make use of in his journey of self-understanding is inappropriate, even if the interpretation is accurate. *If* coming late is a resistance, and if the analyst is sufficiently patient, there will come a time when he will relax enough to become puzzled by his own behavior. He might say, "it's funny, I always seem to come exactly five minutes late," or "I've thought about asking you to start our sessions five minutes late, but I realized I'd only come five minutes later than that." At this point it would be a mistake not to pursue the issue, for a wealth of material may spontaneously emerge: for example, that he wanted to feel that he was in control, that he wanted the analyst to acknowledge him as a serious professional in his own right, etc. Once these desires are recognized, they can be explored—and sometimes that exploration can make a big difference in how the analysand sees himself and how he goes on to live the rest of his life. Should all of this be avoided because of some flat-footed assumption that the analyst is always pulling rank when she talks about resistance? The problem with the cliché is that it ignores all specifics. It uses the very possibility of invoking resistance to impugn psychoanalysis generally.

What is at stake in all of these attacks? If this were merely the attack on one historical figure, Freud, or on one professional group, psychoanalysts, the hubbub would have died down long ago. After all, psychoanalysis nowadays plays a minor role in the mental health professions; Freud is less and less often taught or studied. There is, of course, a certain pleasure to be had in pretending one is bravely attacking a powerful

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authority when one is in fact participating in a gang-up. But even these charms fade after a while. The real object of attack—for which Freud is only a stalking horse—is the very idea of humans having unconscious motivation. A battle may be fought over Freud, but the war is over our culture's image of the human soul. Are we to see humans as having depth—as complex psychological organisms who generate layers of meaning which lie beneath the surface of their own understanding? Or are we to take ourselves as transparent to ourselves?

Certainly, the predominant trend in the culture is to treat human existence as straightforward. In the plethora of self-help books, of alternative therapies, diets and exercise programs, it is assumed that we already know what human happiness is. These programs promise us a shortcut for getting there. And yet we can all imagine someone whose muscle tone is great, who is successful at his job, who "feels good about himself," yet remains a shell of a human being. Breathless articles in the science section of *The New York Times* suggest that the main obstacle to human flourishing is technological. And even this obstacle—in the recent discovery of a gene, or the location of a neuron in the brain, or in the synthesis of a new psychopharmacological agent—may soon be put out of the way. Candide is the ideal reader of the "Science Times." Of course, the *Times* did not invent this image of the best of all possible worlds: it is merely the bellwether for a culture that wishes to ignore the complexity, depth and darkness of human life.

It is difficult to make this point without sounding like a Luddite; so let me say explicitly that psychopharmacology and neuro-psychiatry have made, and will continue to make, valuable contributions in reducing human suffering. But it is a fantasy to suppose that a chemical or neurological intervention can solve the problems posed in and by human life. That is why it is a mistake to think of psychoanalysis and Prozac as two different means to the same end. The point of psychoanalysis is to help us develop a clearer, yet more flexible and creative, sense of what our ends might be. "How shall we live?" is, for Socrates, the fundamental question of human existence—and the attempt to answer that question is, for him, what makes human life worthwhile. And it is Plato and Shakespeare, Proust, Nietzsche and, most recently, Freud who complicated the issue by insisting that there are deep currents of meaning, often crosscurrents, running through the human soul which can at best be glimpsed through a glass darkly. This, if anything, is the Western tradition: not a specific set of values, but a belief that the human soul is too deep for there to be any easy answer to the question of how to live.

If one can dismiss Freud as a charlatan, one cannot only enjoy the sacrifice of a scapegoat, one can also evade troubling questions about the enigmatic nature of human motivation. Never mind that we are daily surrounded by events—from the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin to the war in Bosnia; from the murder of Nicole Simpson to the public fascination with it; from the government's burning of the Branch Davidian compound to the retaliation bombing in Oklahoma City—that cannot be understood in the terms that are standardly used to explain them. Philosophy, Aristotle said, begins in wonder. Psychoanalysis begins in wonder that the unintelligibility of the events that surround one do not cause more wonder.

There are two very different images of what humans must be like if democracy is to be a viable form of government. The prevalent one today treats humans as preference-expressing political atoms, and pays little attention to subatomic structure. Professional pollsters, political scientists and pundits portray society as an agglomeration of these atoms. The only irrationality they recognize is the failure of these preference-expressing monads to conform to the rules of rational choice theory. If one thinks that this is the only image of humanity that will sustain democracy, one will tend to view psychoanalysis as suspiciously anti-democratic.

Is there another, more satisfying, image of what humans are like which nevertheless makes it plausible that they should organize themselves and live in democratic societies? If we go back to the greatest participatory democracy the world has known—the polis of fifth-century Athens—we see that the flourishing of that democracy coincides precisely with the flowering of one of the world's great literatures: Greek tragedy. This coincidence is not mere coincidence. The tragic theater gave citizens the opportunity to retreat momentarily from the responsibility of making rational decisions for themselves and their society. At the same time, tragedy confronted them emotionally with the fact that they had to make their decisions in a world that was not entirely rational, in which rationality was sometimes violently disrupted, in which rationality itself could be used for irrational ends.

What, after all, is Oedipus's complex? That he killed his father and married his mother misses the point. Patricide and maternal incest are *consequences* of Oedipus's failure, not its source. Oedipus's fundamental mistake lies in his assumption that meaning is transparent to human reason. In horrified response to the Delphic oracle, Oedipus flees the people he (mistakenly) takes to be his parents. En route, he kills his actual father and propels himself into the arms of his mother. It is the classic scene of fulfilling one's fate in the very act of trying to escape it. But this scenario is only possible because Oedipus assumes he understands his situation, that the meaning of the oracle is immediately available to his conscious understanding. That is why he thinks he can respond to the oracle with a straightforward application of practical reason. Oedipus's mistake, in essence, is to ignore unconscious meaning.

For Sophocles, this was a sacrilegious crime, for he took this obscure meaning to flow from a divine source. But it is clear that, in Sophocles's vision, Oedipus

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attacks the very idea of unconscious meaning. In his angry confrontation with the prophet Tiresias, Oedipus boasts that it was his conscious reasoning, not any power of interpreting obscure meaning, which saved the city from the horrible Sphinx.

> "Why, come, tell me, how can you be a true prophet? Why when the versifying hound was here did you not speak some word that could release the citizens? Indeed, her riddle was not one for the first comer to explain! It required prophetic skill, and you were exposed as having no knowledge from the birds or from the gods. No, it was I that came, Oedipus who knew nothing, and put a stop to her; I hit the mark by native wit, not by what I learned from birds."

What was Sophocles's message to the Athenian citizens who flocked to the theater? *You ignore the realm of unconscious meaning at your peril. Do so, and Oedipus's fate will be yours.* From this perspective, democratic citizens need to maintain a certain humility in the face of meanings which remain opaque to human reason. We need to be wary that what we take to be an exercise of reason will both hide and express an irrationality of which we remain unaware.

In all the recent attacks on Freud, can't one hear echoes of Oedipus's attack on Tiresias? Isn't the attack on Freud itself a repetition and re-enactment of Oedipus's complex, less an attack on the father than an attack on the very idea of repressed, unconscious meaning? One indication that this is so—a symptom, if you will—is that none of the attacks on Freud addresses the problems of human existence to which psychoanalysis is a response. From a psychoanalytic perspective, human irrationality is not merely a failure to make a coherent set of choices. Sometimes it is an unintelligible intrusion that overwhelms reason and blows it apart. Sometimes it is method in madness. But how could there be *method* in *madness*? Even if Freud did botch this case or ambitiously pursue that end, we still need to account for the pervasive manifestations of human irrationality. This is the issue, and it is one which the attacks on Freud ignore.

The real question is whether, and how, responsible autonomy is possible. In the development of the human self-image from Sophocles to Freud, there has been a shift in the locus of hidden meaning from a divine to the all-too-human realm. At first, it might look as though the recognition of a dark strain running through the human soul might threaten the viability of democratic culture. Certainly, the twentieth-century critiques of Enlightenment optimism, with the corresponding emphasis on human irrationality, also question or even pour scorn on the democratic ideal. It is in this context that Freud comes across as a much more ambiguous figure than he is normally taken to be. In one way, he is the advocate of the unconscious; in another, he is himself filled with Enlightenment optimism that the problems posed by the unconscious can be solved; in yet another, he is wary of the dark side of the human soul and pessimistic about doing much to alleviate psychological pain. He is Tiresias and Oedipus and Sophocles rolled into one.

If, for the moment, we concentrate on the optimism, we see a vision emerge of how one might both take human irrationality seriously and participate in a democratic ideal. If the source of irrationality lies within, rather than outside, the human realm, the possibility opens up of a responsible engagement with it. Psychoanalysis is, in its essence, the attempt to work out just such an engagement. It is a technique that allows dark meanings and irrational motivations to rise to the surface of conscious awareness. They can then be taken into account; they can be influenced by other considerations; and they become less liable to disrupt human life in violent and incomprehensible ways. Critics of psychoanalysis complain that it is a luxury of the few. But, from the current perspective, no thinker has made creativity and imagination more democratically available than Freud. This is one of the truly important consequences of locating the unconscious inside the psyche. Creativity is no longer the exclusive preserve of the divinely inspired, or the few great poets. From a psychoanalytic point of view, everyone is poetic; everyone dreams in metaphor and generates symbolic meaning in the process of living. Even in their prose, people have unwittingly been speaking poetry all along.

And the question now is: To what poetic use are we going to put Freud? Freud *is* dead. He died in 1939, after an extraordinarily productive and creative life. Beneath the continued attacks upon him, ironically, lies an unwillingness to let him go. It is Freud who taught that only after we accept the actual death of an important person in our lives can we begin to mourn. Only then can he or she take on full symbolic life for us. Obsessing about Freud *the man* is a way of keeping Freud *the meaning* at bay. Freud's meaning, I think, lies in the recognition that humans make more meaning than they grasp, that this meaning can be painful and disruptive, but that humans need not be passive in the face of it. Freud began a process of dealing with unconscious meaning, and it is important not to get stuck on him, like some rigid symptom, either to idolize or to denigrate him. The many attacks on him, even upon psychoanalysis, refuse to recognize that Freud gave birth to a psychoanalytic movement which in myriad ways has moved beyond him. If Freud is alive anywhere, it is in a tradition which in its development of more sensitive techniques, and more sophisticated ways of thinking about unconscious motivation, has rendered some of the particular things Freud thought or did irrelevant. Just as democracy requires the recognition that the king is dead, both as an individual and as an institution, so the democratic recognition that each person is the maker of unconscious, symbolic meaning requires the acceptance of Freud's death. What matters, as Freud himself well understood, is what we are able to do with the meanings we make. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

The Cards Re-Shuffled

If you have tears, prepare not to shed them now. At the end of Martin Scorsese's **Casino** (Universal), set mostly in Las Vegas in the 1970s, we see buildings being demolished there in the early 1980s, while a voice-over mourns the passing of the old high-crime Vegas and the arrival of something like Disneyland. Sobs fail to catch in our throats. What we have seen until then has been a chronicle of Mafia dealings and corruption, savagely laced with blood. This is the era whose passing we are asked to mourn.

Let's believe, shall we, that crime is greatly lessened in Vegas today. Even if this is true, Scorsese's elegiac note still seems a wee bit ludicrous. The usual rationale for misjudgments of this kind is that it is a put-on—in this case, Scorsese is really satirizing our sentimentality about Mafia life. Then how come the put-on begins so late in the picture?

But if we take *Casino* at face value, along with the other values that this face entails, it is basically a flight. Scorsese is fleeing Edith Wharton and the discomforts that nagged *The Age of Innocence*: he's back where he's at ease. This regained ease has freed his inarguable cinematic invention, his scintillating skills, but, in itself, that release isn't enough. He has lavished his talents on materials that are very familiar or, what's worse in a way, seem so even when they aren't. He was so eager to gobble up this feast of Italianate crime that he overlooked the staleness of most of the courses.

The film derives from a non-fiction book by Nicholas Pileggi, who co-wrote the screenplay with Scorsese. (Both of these facts were also true of *GoodFellas*.) The trouble with non-fiction crime these days is that it seems to derive from previous fiction. Once again we get the rise of Little Caesar—in this case two Caesars. Once again a hardboiled woman ties one of the hardboiled guys in emotional knots. Once again we get the protagonists' downfalls, guaranteed by their rise to power. Once again—this possibly in fuller detail than before—we get the business operations of the criminals, the family tree of kickback and payoff and scam.

Beyond question Scorsese knows how to make a film move. The question is, does he do much more than make this one move? The pace, the pyrotechnics, the lambasting score, the sex in swift strokes that make it sexier, are all smashing. (Once Scorsese even closes a scene with an iris-out. This puzzled me. Truffaut used the device for filmic nostalgia; that's not one of Scorsese's aims.) But meanwhile, those of us who don't automatically assume that if a virtuoso director chooses a tired subject he must have a deep subtext in mind, are puzzled. We wonder how Scorsese could have found the energy for the virtuosic display that gives this film its shine. The only explanation I could think of was that after the misadventure with Wharton, Scorsese wanted to re-establish his bankability. That is certainly a comprehensible motive in a director's career: I just wish it had been a little less obvious.

Scorsese's cast has been as overpraised as himself. Joe Pesci, in *GoodFellas*, did virtually everything he does in *Casino*—as a murderous hood who moves in on the casinos of Vegas. Pesci is good at homicidal solipsism: when he wants something, or wants to do away with something, he goes after it with almost the same sense of all-in-a-day's-work as a sales clerk breaking a roll of quarters into a till. This quietly manic cold-bloodedness is scary, but that's all there is to Pesci—in *GoodFellas* and here. Scorsese simply added stock Pesci to the recipe.

Sharon Stone, as a Vegas hustler who knows how to play her cards and her loins, is being hailed for her new intensity. In fact, before she made her breakthrough in *Basic Instinct*, she brimmed with intensity in *Year of the Gun*, a strong performance that went largely unnoticed. Here she doesn't have much more range than she has shown in her career so far.

Her role, however, contains the most original wrinkle in the script. Surrounded by money and power and tough top men, cool with all of them, she can't restrain her weakness for a petty little crooked loafer whom she met when she was young and who bugs her for money. (James Woods is creepy in the part.) This fissure in a smart woman's smartness is the most interesting character touch in the film.

Robert De Niro, as the smoothie who marries her, has in a way achieved Brando status—or call it Brando immunity. Whenever Brando has done anything at all in the last twenty years, no matter how

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The American President. *Rosy romance in a realistic setting—the White House. Michael Douglas is fairly secure as the president, Annette Bening delights as the lobbyist he falls for. A dream of liberal politics. (Reviewed 12/18/95)* **Carrington.** *The odd lifelong love of Dora Carrington (Emma Thompson) and Lytton Strachey (Jonathan Pryce). Splendid performances in a somewhat cool but delightfully intelligent screenplay. (12/4/95)* **Devil in a Blue Dress.** *A crime thriller with a mostly black cast. A modest dilution of Raymond Chandler, interesting for its views of L.A. black life twenty years before Watts. (10/30/95)* **Les Misérables.** *A twentieth-century analogue of Hugo, interwoven with scenes from the original. Jean-Paul Belmondo is robust in both stories. Messy but enjoyable. (11/20/95)*—**SK**

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thin or routine or freakish, the praise seems to have been written in advance. The performance was by Brando, therefore titanic. De Niro, greatly gifted, though nowhere near the quintessential Brando, now seems assured of the Brando reception. The king can do no wrong, even when he isn't doing much of anything.

Here De Niro plays a gambler with an uncanny ability to pick winners. The Mafia *capo*, operating out of Kansas City, chooses him to run the mob's Vegas operation, even though he is a Jew (named Rothstein). As long as things go well, his Jewishness doesn't figure; when troubles come, the slurring starts.

In Vegas he meets, beds and eventually marries Stone, and they start a family. All might have continued to go well in his job except that his success as a casino manager begins to intoxicate him, and he refuses to play ball with local authorities. Trouble follows, and Kansas City decides to dump him. In fact, we see the dumping at the very beginning, though we don't know what it's about; when we learn, we also learn that it's misleading.

De Niro has poise and, when poised, has control. Once in a while, when the moment requires him to lose poise—as when he pleads in his doorway for Stone not to leave him—he also loses wholeness, complete conviction. But even at his best here, he is asked to do little that couldn't have been done very well by, say, Andy Garcia.

For the cinematography, Scorsese summoned Robert Richardson, best-known as Oliver Stone's colleague on *Platoon*, *JFK* and *Natural Born Killers*. Richardson clearly loves explosion, whether it's gunfire or De Niro's lurid clothes. Scorsese's editor, as she has been for many pictures, was Thelma Schoonmaker, who gave this picture much of its sizzle. She couldn't have done it without the material that Scorsese supplied, but with it, she really takes off.

Either onward or inward for Scorsese, I hope. Either he moves onward courageously to an unfamiliar subject, like the provocative *Last Temptation of Christ*, or he plumbs deeply into relatively familiar terrain, like the superb *Raging Bull*. *Casino* is only glitzy wheel-spinning. (Three hours of it, too.) •

The Nobel Lecture.

Crediting Poetry

By Seamus Heaney

When I first encountered the name of the city of Stockholm, I little thought that I would ever visit it, never mind end up being welcomed to it as a guest of the Swedish Academy and the Nobel Foundation. At that particular time, such an outcome was not just beyond expectation: it was simply beyond conception. In the 1940s, when I was the eldest child of an ever-growing family in rural Co. Derry, we crowded together in the three rooms of a traditional thatched farmstead and lived a kind of den-life which was more or less emotionally and intellectually proofed against the outside world. It was an intimate, physical, creaturely existence in which the night sounds of the horse in the stable beyond one bedroom wall mingled with the sounds of adult conversation from the kitchen beyond the other. We took in everything that was going on, of course—rain in the trees, mice on the ceiling, a steam train rumbling along the railway line one field back from the house—but we took it in as if we were in the doze of hibernation. Ahistorical, pre-sexual, in suspension between the archaic and the modern, we were as susceptible and impressionable as the drinking water that stood in a bucket in our scullery: every time a passing train made the earth shake, the surface of that water used to ripple delicately, concentrically, and in utter silence.

But it was not only the earth that shook for us: the air around and above us was alive and signalling also. When a wind stirred in the beeches, it stirred too an aerial wire attached to the topmost branch of the chestnut tree. Down it swept, in through a hole bored in the corner of the kitchen window, right on into the innards of our wireless set, where a little pandemonium of burbles and squeaks would suddenly give way to the voice of a BBC newsreader speaking out of the unexpected like a *deus ex machina*. And that voice too we could hear in our bedroom, transmitting from beyond and behind the voices of the adults in the kitchen; just as we could often hear, behind and beyond every voice, the frantic, piercing signalling of morse code.

We could pick up the names of neighbours being spoken in the local accents of our parents, and in the resonant English tones of the newsreader the names of bombers and of cities bombed, of war fronts and army divisions, the numbers of planes lost and of prisoners taken, of casualties suffered and advances made; and always, of course, we would pick up too those other, solemn and oddly bracing words, "the enemy" and "the allies." But even so, none of the news of these world-spasms entered me as terror. If there was something ominous in the newscaster's tones, there was something torpid about our understanding of what was at stake; and if there was something culpable about such political ignorance in that time and place, there was something positive about the security I inhabited as a result of it.

The wartime, in other words, was pre-reflective time for me. Preliterate too. Prehistorical in its way. Then as the years went on and my listening became more deliberate, I would climb up on an arm of our big sofa to get my ear closer to the wireless speaker. But it was still not the news that interested me; what I was after was the thrill of story, such as a detective serial about a British special agent called Dick Barton or perhaps a radio adaptation of one of Capt. W.E. Johns's adventure tales about an RAF flying ace called Biggles. Now that the other children were older and there was so much going on in the kitchen, I had to get close to the actual radio set in order to concentrate my hearing, and in that intent proximity to the dial I grew familiar with the tones of foreign stations, with Leipzig and Oslo and Stuttgart and Warsaw and, of course, with Stockholm.

I also got used to hearing short bursts of foreign languages as the dial hand swept round from BBC to Radio Eireann, from the intonations of London to those of Dublin, and even though I did not understand what was being said in those first encounters with the gutturals and sibilants of European speech, I had already begun a journey into the wideness of the world. This in turn became a journey into the wideness of language, a journey where each point of arrival—whether in one's poetry or one's life—

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turned out to be a stepping stone rather than a destination, and it is that journey which has brought me now to this honoured spot. And yet the platform here feels more like a space station than a stepping stone, so that is why, for once in my life, I am permitting myself the luxury of walking on air.

I credit poetry for making this spacewalk possible. I credit it immediately because of a line I wrote fairly recently encouraging myself (and whoever else might be listening) to "walk on air against your better judgment." But I credit it ultimately because poetry can make an order as true to the impact of external reality and as sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being as the ripples that rippled in and rippled out across the water in that scullery bucket fifty years ago. An order where we can at last grow up to that which we stored up as we grew. An order which satisfies all that is appetitive in the intelligence and prehensile in the affections. I credit poetry, in other words, both for being itself and for being a help, for making possible a fluid and restorative relationship between the mind's centre and its circumference, between the child gazing at the word "Stockholm" on the face of the radio dial and the man facing the faces that he meets in Stockholm at this most privileged moment. I credit it because credit is due to it, in our time and in all time, for its truth to life, in every sense of that phrase.

To begin with, I wanted that truth to life to possess a concrete reliability, and rejoiced most when the poem seemed most direct, an upfront representation of the world it stood for or stood up for or stood its ground against. Even as a schoolboy, I loved John Keats's ode "To Autumn" for being an ark of the covenant between language and sensation; as an adolescent, I loved Gerard Manley Hopkins for the intensity of his exclamations which were also equations for a rapture and an ache I didn't fully know I knew until I read him; I loved Robert Frost for his farmer's accuracy and his wily down-to-earthness; and Chaucer too for much the some reasons. Later on I would find a different kind of accuracy, a moral down-to-earthness to which I responded deeply and always will, in the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, a poetry where a New Testament sensibility suffers and absorbs the shock of the new century's barbarism. Then later again, in the pure consequence of Elizabeth Bishop's style, in the sheer obduracy of Robert Lowell's and in the barefaced confrontation of Patrick Kavanagh's, I encountered further reasons for believing in poetry's ability—and responsibility—to say what happens, to "pity the planet," to be "not concerned with Poetry."

This temperamental disposition towards an art that was earnest and devoted to things as they are was corroborated by the experience of having been born and brought up in Northern Ireland, and of having lived with that place, even though I have lived out of it for the past quarter of a century. No place in the world prides itself more on its vigilance and realism, no place considers itself more qualified to censure any flourish of rhetoric or extravagance of aspiration. So, partly as a result of having internalized these attitudes through growing up with them, and partly as a result of growing a skin to protect myself against them, I went for years half-avoiding and half-resisting the opulence and extensiveness of poets as different as Wallace Stevens and Rainer Maria Rilke; crediting insufficiently the crystalline inwardness of Emily Dickinson, all those forked lightnings and fissures of association; and missing the visionary strangeness of Eliot. And these more or less costive attitudes were fortified by a refusal to grant the poet any more license than any other citizen; and they were further induced by having to conduct oneself as a poet in a situation of ongoing political violence and public expectation. A public expectation, it has to be said, not of poetry as such but of political positions variously approvable by mutually disapproving groups.

In such circumstances, the mind still longs to repose in what Samuel Johnson once called with superb confidence "the stability of truth," even as it recognizes the destabilizing nature of its own operations and enquiries. Without needing to be theoretically instructed, consciousness quickly realizes that it is the site of variously contending discourses. The child in the bedroom listening simultaneously to the domestic idiom of his Irish home and the official idioms of the British broadcaster while picking up from behind both the signals of some other distress, that child was already being schooled for the complexities of his adult predicament, a future where he would have to adjudicate among promptings variously ethical, aesthetical, moral, political, metrical, skeptical, cultural, topical, typical, post-colonial and, taken all together, simply impossible. So it was that I found myself in the mid-1970s in another small house, this time in Co. Wicklow south of Dublin, with a young family of my own and a sightly less imposing radio set, listening to the rain in the trees and to the news of bombings closer to home—not only those by the Provisional IRA in Belfast but equally atrocious assaults in Dublin by loyalist paramilitaries from the north. Feeling puny in my predicaments as I read about the tragic logic of Osip Mandelstam's fate in the 1930s, feeling challenged yet steadfast in my noncombatant status when I heard, for example, that one particularly sweet-natured school friend had been interned without trial because he was suspected of having been involved in a political killing. What I was longing for was not quite stability but an active escape from the quicksand of relativism, a way of crediting poetry without anxiety or apology. In a poem called "Exposure" I wrote then:

> If I could come on meteorite!
> Instead I walk through damp leaves,
> Husks, the spent flukes of autumn,
>
> Imagining a hero
> On some muddy compound,
> His gift like a slingstone
> Whirled for the desperate.
>
> How did I end up like this?
> I often think of my friends'
> Beautiful prismatic counselling
> And the anvil brains of some who hate me
>
> As I sit weighing and weighing
> My responsible *tristia*.
> For what? For the ear? For the people?
> For what is said behind-backs?
>
> Rain comes down through the alders,
> Its low conducive voices
> Mutter about let-downs and erosions
> And yet each drop recalls
>
> The diamond absolutes.
> I am neither internee nor informer;
> An inner émigré, grown long-haired
> And thoughtful; a wood-kerne
>
> Escaped from the massacre,
> Taking protective colouring
> From bole and bark, feeling
> Every wind that blows;
>
> Who, blowing up these sparks
> For their meagre heat, have missed
> The once-in-a-lifetime portent,
> The comet's pulsing rose.

In one of the poems best known to students in my generation, a poem which could be said to have taken the nutrients of the symbolist movement and made them available in capsule form, the American poet Archibald MacLeish affirmed that "Poetry should be equal to/not true." As a defiant statement of poetry's gift for telling truth but telling it slant, this is both cogent and corrective. Yet there are times when a deeper need enters, when we want the poem to be not only pleasurably right but compellingly wise, not only a surprising variation played upon the world, but a re-tuning of the world itself. We want the surprise to be transitive, like the impatient thump which unexpectedly restores the picture to the television set, or the electric shock which sets the fibrillating heart

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back to its proper rhythm. We want what the woman wanted in the prison queue in Leningrad, standing there blue with cold and whispering for fear, enduring the terror of Stalin's regime and asking the poet Anna Akhmatova if she could describe it all, if her art could be equal to it. And this is the want I too was experiencing in those far more protected circumstances in Co. Wicklow when I wrote the lines I have just quoted, a need for poetry that would merit the definition I gave a few moments ago, as an order "true to the impact of external reality and ... sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being."

The external reality and inner dynamic of happenings in Northern Ireland between 1968 and 1974 were symptomatic of change—violent change admittedly, but change nevertheless. For the minority living there, change had been long overdue. It should have come early, as the result of the ferment of protest on the streets in the late '60s, but that was not to be; and the eggs of danger which were always incubating got hatched out very quickly. While the Christian moralist in oneself was impelled to deplore the atrocious nature of the IRA's campaign of bombings and killings, and the "mere Irish" in oneself was appalled by the ruthlessness of the British Army on occasions like Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972, the minority citizen in oneself, the one who had grown up conscious that his group was distrusted and discriminated against in all kinds of official and unofficial ways, this citizen's perception was at one with the poetic truth of the situation in recognizing that if life in Northern Ireland were ever really to flourish, change had to take place. But that citizen's perception was also at one with the truth in recognizing that the very brutality of the means by which the IRA was pursuing change was destructive of the trust upon which new possibilities would have to be based.

Nevertheless, until the British government caved in to the strong-arm tactics of the Ulster loyalist workers after the Sunningdale Conference in 1974, a well-disposed mind could still hope to make sense of the circumstances, to balance what was promising with what was destructive and do what Yeats had tried to do half a century before, namely, "to hold in a single thought reality and justice." After 1974, however, for the twenty long years between then and the ceasefires of August 1994, such a hope was impossible. The violence from below was then productive of nothing but a retaliatory violence from above, the dream of justice became subsumed into the callousnesss of reality, and people settled in to a quarter century of life-waste and spirit-waste, of hardening attitudes and narrowing possibilities that were the natural result of political solidarity, traumatic suffering and sheer emotional self-protectiveness.

One of the most harrowing moments in the whole history of the harrowing of the heart in Northern Ireland came when a minibus full of workers being driven home one January evening in 1976 was held up by armed and masked men and the occupants of the van ordered at gunpoint to line up at the side of the road. Then one of the masked executioners said to them, "Any Catholics among you, step out here." As it happened, this particular group, with one exception, were all Protestants, so the presumption must have been that the masked men were Protestant paramilitaries about to carry out a tit-for-tat sectarian killing of the Catholic as the odd man out, the one who would have been presumed to be in sympathy with the IRA and all its actions. It was a terrible moment for him, caught between dread and witness, but he did make a motion to step forward. Then, the story goes, in that split second of decision, and in the relative cover of the winter evening darkness, he felt the hand of the Protestant worker next to him take his hand and squeeze it in a signal that said no, don't move, we'll not betray you, nobody need know what faith or party you belong to. All in vain, however, for the man stepped out of the line; but instead of finding a gun at his temple, he was pushed away as the gunmen opened fire on those remaining in the line, for these were not Protestant terrorists, but members, presumably, of the Provisional IRA.

It is difficult at times to repress the thought that history is about as instructive as an abattoir; that Tacitus was right and peace is merely the desolation left behind after the decisive operations of merciless power. I remember, for example, shocking myself with a thought I had about that friend who was imprisoned in the '70s upon suspicion of having been involved with a political murder: I shocked myself by thinking that even if he were guilty, he might still perhaps be helping the future to be born, breaking the repressive forms and liberating new potential in the only way that worked, that is to say the violent way—which therefore became, by extension, the right way. It was like a moment of exposure to interstellar cold, a reminder of the scary element, both inner and outer, in which human beings must envisage and conduct their lives. But it was only a moment. The birth of the future we desire is surely in the contraction which that terrified Catholic felt on the roadside when another hand gripped his hand, not in the gunfire that followed, so absolute and so desolate, if also so much a part of the music of what happens.

As writers and readers, as sinners and citizens, our realism and our aesthetic sense make us wary of crediting the positive note. The very gunfire braces us, and the atrocious confers a worth upon the effort which it calls forth to confront it. We are rightly in awe of the torsions in the poetry of Paul Celan and rightly enamoured of the suspiring voice in Samuel Beckett, because these are evidence that art can rise to the occasion and somehow be the corollary of Celan's stricken destiny as a Holocaust survivor and Beckett's demure heroism as a member of the French Resistance. Likewise, we are rightly suspicious of that which gives too much consolation in these circumstances; the very extremity of our late-twentieth-century knowledge puts much of our cultural heritage to an extreme test. Only the very stupid or the very deprived can any longer help knowing that the documents of civilization have been written in blood and tears, blood and tears no less real for being very remote. And when this intellectual predisposition coexists with the actualities of Ulster and Israel and Bosnia and Rwanda and a host of other wounded spots on the face of the earth, the inclination is not only not to credit human nature with much constructive potential but not to credit anything too positive in the work of art.

Which is why for years I was bowed to the desk like some monk bowed over his prie-dieu, some dutiful contemplative pivoting his understanding in an attempt to bear his portion of the weight of the world, knowing himself incapable of heroic virtue or redemptive effect, but constrained by his obedience to his rule to repeat the effort and the posture. Blowing up sparks for a meagre heat. Forgetting faith, straining towards good works. Attending insufficiently to the diamond absolutes, among which must be counted the sufficiency of that which is absolutely imagined. Then finally and happily, and not in obedience to the dolorous circumstances of my native place but in spite of them, I straightened up. I began a few years ago to try to make space in my reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as for the murderous. And once again I shall try to represent the import of that changed orientation with a story out of Ireland.

This is a story about another monk

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holding himself up valiantly in the posture of endurance. It is said that once upon a time St. Kevin was kneeling with his arms stretched out in the form of a cross in Glendalough, a monastic site not too far from where we lived in Co. Wicklow, a place which to this day is one of the most wooded and watery retreats in the whole of the country. Anyhow, as Kevin knelt and prayed, a blackbird mistook his outstretched hand for some kind of roost and swooped down upon it, laid a clutch of eggs in it and proceeded to nest in it as if it were the branch of a tree. Then, overcome with pity and constrained by his faith to love the life in all creatures great and small, Kevin stayed immobile for hours and days and nights and weeks, holding out his hand until the eggs hatched and the fledglings grew wings, true to life if subversive of common sense, at the intersection of natural process and the glimpsed ideal, at one and the same time a signpost and a reminder. Manifesting that order of poetry where we can at last grow up to that which we stored up as we grew.

St. Kevin's story is, as I say, a story out of Ireland. But it strikes me that it could equally well come out of India or Africa or the Arctic or the Americas. By which I do not mean merely to consign it to a typology of folktales, or to dispute its value by questioning its culture-bound status within a multicultural context. On the contrary, its trustworthiness and its travelworthiness have to do with its local setting. I can, of course, imagine it being deconstructed nowadays as a paradigm of colonialism, with Kevin figuring as the benign imperialist (or the missionary in the wake of the imperialist), the one who intervenes and appropriates the indigenous life and interferes with its pristine ecology. And I have to admit that there is an irony that it should have been such a one who recorded and preserved this instance of the true beauty of the Irish heritage: Kevin's story, after all, appears in the writings of a Norman chronicler, Giraldus Cambrensis, one of the people who invaded Ireland in the twelfth century, one whom Irish-language annalist Geoffrey Keating called, 500 years later, "the bull of the herd of those who wrote the false history of Ireland." But even so, I still cannot persuade myself that this manifestation of early Christian civilization should be construed all that simply as a way into whatever is exploitative or barbaric in our history, past and present. The whole conception strikes me rather as being another example of the kind of work I saw a few weeks ago in the small museum in Sparta, on the morning before the news of this year's Nobel Prize in Literature was announced.

This was art which sprang from a cult very different from the faith espoused by St. Kevin. Yet in it there was a representation of a roosted bird and an entranced beast and an self-enrapturing man, except that this time the man was Orpheus and the rapture came from music rather than prayer. The work itself was a small carved relief, and I could not help making a sketch of it; but neither could I help copying out the information typed on the card which accompanied and identified the exhibit. The image moved me because of its antiquity and durability, but the description on the card moved me also because it gave a name and credence to that which I see myself as having been engaged upon for the past three decades. "Votive panel," the identification card said, "possibly set up to Orpheus by local poet. Local work of the Hellenistic period."

Once again, I hope I am not being sentimental or simply fetishizing—as we have learnt to say—the local. I wish instead to suggest that images and stories of the kind I am invoking here do function as bearers of value. The century has witnessed the defeat of Nazism by force of arms; but the erosion of the Soviet regimes was caused by, among other things, the sheer persistence, beneath

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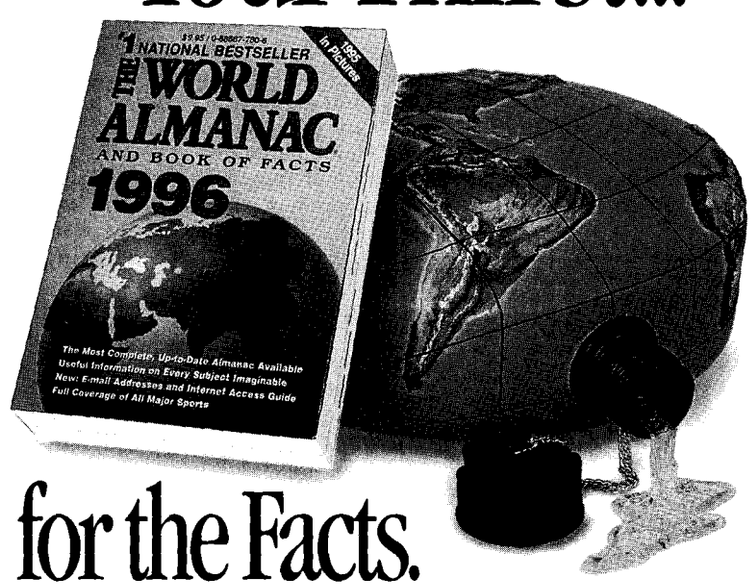
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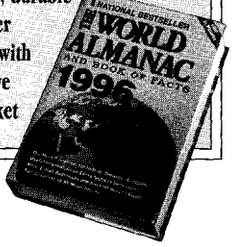

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the imposed ideological conformity, of cultural values and psychic resistances of the kind that these stories and images enshrine. Even if we have learned to be rightly and deeply fearful of elevating the cultural forms and conservatisms of any nation into normative and exclusivist systems, even if we have terrible proof that pride in the ethnic and religious heritage can quickly degrade into the fascistic, our vigilance on that score should not displace our love and trust in the good of the indigenous, per se.

On the contrary, a trust in the staying power and the travelworthiness of such good should encourage us to credit the possibility of a world where respect for the validity of every tradition will issue in the creation and maintenance of a salubrious political space. In spite of devastating and repeated acts of massacre, assassination and extirpation, the huge acts of faith which have marked the new relations between Palestinians and Israelis, Africans and Afrikaaners, and the way in which walls have come down in Europe and iron curtains have opened, all this inspires a hope that new possibility can still open up in Ireland as well. The crux of that problem involves an ongoing partition of the island between British and Irish jurisdictions, and an equally persistent partition of the affections in Northern Ireland between the British and the Irish heritages; but surely every dweller in the country must hope that the governments involved in its governance can devise institutions which will allow that partition to become a bit more like the net on a tennis court, a demarcation allowing for agile give-and-take, for encounter and contending, prefiguring a future where the vitality that flowed in the beginning from those bracing words "enemy" and "allies" might finally derive from a less binary and altogether less binding vocabulary.

When the poet W.B. Yeats stood on this platform more than seventy years ago, Ireland was emerging from the throes of a traumatic civil war that had followed fast on the heels of a war of independence fought against the British. The struggle that ensued had been brief enough; it was over by May, 1923, some seven months before Yeats sailed to Stockholm, but it was bloody, savage and intimate, and for generations to come it would dictate the terms of politics within the twenty-six independent counties of Ireland, that part of the island known first of all as the Irish Free State and then subsequently as the Republic of Ireland.

Yeats barely alluded to the civil war or the war of independence in his Nobel speech. Nobody understood better than he the connection between the construction or destruction of a political order and the founding or foundering of a cultural life: but on this occasion he chose to talk instead about the Irish Dramatic Movement. His story was about the creative purpose of that movement, and its historic good fortune in having not only his own genius to sponsor it, but also the genius of his friends John Millington Synge and Lady Augusta Gregory. He came to Sweden to tell the world that the local work of poets and dramatists had been as important to the transformation of his native place and times as the ambushes of guerrilla armies.

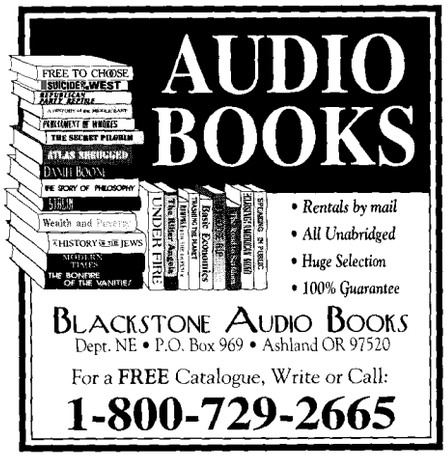
His boast in that elevated prose was essentially the same as the one he would make in verse more than a decade later in his poem "The Municipal Gallery Revisited." There Yeats presents himself amongst the portraits and heroic narrative paintings which celebrate the events and personalities of recent history, and all of a sudden he realizes that something truly epoch-making has occurred: "'This is not,' I say,/ 'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland/ The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.'" And the poem concludes with two of the most quoted lines of his entire oeuvre:

> Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
> And say my glory was I had such friends.

And yet, expansive and thrilling as these lines are, they are an instance of poetry flourishing itself rather than proving itself, they are the poet's lap of honour, and in this respect if in no other they resemble what I am doing in this lecture. In fact, I should also quote here on my own behalf some other words from the poem: "You that would judge me, do not judge alone/ This book or that..." Instead, I ask you to do what Yeats asked his audience to do and think of the achievement of Irish poets and dramatists and novelists over the past forty years, among whom I am proud to count great friends. In literary matters, Ezra Pound advised against accepting the opinion of those "who haven't themselves produced notable work," and it is advice I have been privileged to follow, since it is the good opinion of notable workers—and not just those in my own country—that has fortified my endeavor since I began to write in Belfast more than thirty years ago.

Yeats, however, was by no means all flourish. To the credit of poetry in our century, there must surely be entered in any reckoning his two great sequences of poems entitled "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and "Meditations in Time of Civil War," the latter of which contains the famous lyric about the bird's nest at his window, where a starling or stare had built in a crevice of the old wall. The poet was living then in a Norman tower which had been very much a part of the military history of the country in earlier times, and as his thoughts turned upon the irony of civilizations being consolidated by violent and powerful conquerors who end up commissioning the artists and the architects, he began to associate the sight of a mother bird feeding its young with the image of the honey-bee, an image deeply lodged in poetic tradition and always suggestive of the ideal of an industrious, harmonious, nurturing commonwealth:

> The bees build in the crevices
> Of loosening masonry, and there
> The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
> My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
> Come build in the empty house of the stare.
>
> We are closed in, and the key is turned
> On our uncertainty; somewhere
> A man is killed, or a house burned,
> Yet no clear fact to be discerned;
> Come build in the empty house of the stare.
>
> A barricade of stone or of wood;
> Some fourteen days of civil war;
> Last night they trundled down the road
> That dead young soldier in his blood:
> Come build in the empty house of the stare.



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We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the
stare.

I have heard this poem repeated often, in whole and in part, by people in Ireland over the past twenty-five years, and no wonder, for it is as tender-minded towards life itself as St. Kevin was and as tough-minded about what happens in and to life as Homer. It knows that the massacre will happen again on the roadside, that the workers in the minibus are going to be lined up and shot down just after quitting time; but it also credits as a reality the squeeze of the hand, the actuality of sympathy and protectiveness between living creatures. It satisfies the contradictory needs which consciousness experiences at times of extreme crisis, the need on the one hand for a truth-telling that will be hard and retributive, and on the other hand, the need not to harden the mind to a point where it denies its own yearnings for sweetness and trust. It is a proof that poetry can be equal to *and* true at the same time, an example of that completely adequate poetry which the Russian woman sought from Anna Akhmatova, and which William Wordsworth produced at a corresponding moment of historical crisis and personal dismay almost exactly 200 years ago.

When the bard Demodocus sings of the fall of Troy and of the slaughter that accompanied it, Odysseus weeps and Homer says that his tears were like the tears of a wife on a battlefield weeping for the death of a fallen husband. His epic simile continues (in Robert Fitzgerald's translation):

At the sight of the man panting and dying
there,
she slips down to enfold him, crying out;
then feels the spears, prodding her back
and shoulders,
and goes bound into slavery and grief.
Piteous weeping wears away her cheeks:
but no more piteous than Odysseus's tears,
cloaked as they were, now, from the
company.

Even today, 3,000 years later, as we channel-surf over so much live coverage of contemporary slavery, highly informed but nevertheless in danger of growing immune, familiar to the point of overfamiliarity with old newsreels of the concentration camp and the gulag, Homer's image can still bring us to our senses. The callousness of those spear shafts on the woman's back and shoulders survives time and translation. The

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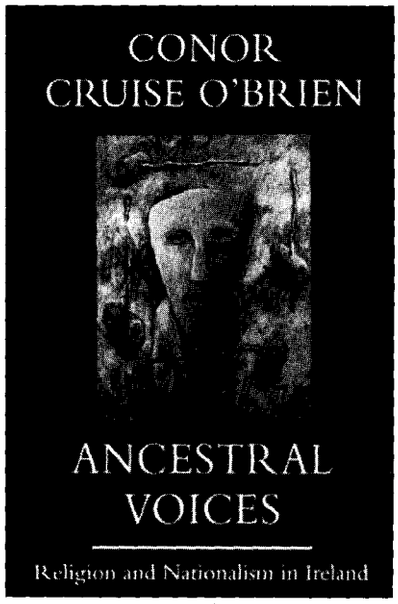

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image has that documentary adequacy which answers all that we know about the intolerable.

But there is another kind of adequacy which is specific to lyric poetry. This has to do with the "temple inside our hearing" which the passage of the poem calls into being. It is an adequacy deriving from what Mandelstam called "the steadfastness of speech articulation," from the resolution and independence which the entirely realized poem sponsors. It has as much to do with the energy released by linguistic fission and fusion, with the buoyancy generated by cadence and tone and the rhyme and stanza, as it has to do with the poem's concerns or the poet's truthfulness. In fact, in lyric poetry, truthfulness becomes recognizable as a ring of truth within the medium itself. And it is the unappeasable pursuit of this note, a note tuned to its most opulent in John Keats, it is this which keeps the poet's ear straining to hear the totally persuasive voice behind all the other informing voices.

Which is a way of saying that I have never quite climbed down from the arm of that sofa. I may have grown more attentive to the news and more alive to the world history and world-sorrow behind it. But the thing uttered by the speaker I strain towards is still not quite the story of what is going on. It is more reflexive than that, because as a poet I am straining towards a strain, in the sense that the effort is to repose in the stability conferred by a musically satisfying order of sounds. As if the ripple at its widest desired to be verified by a reformation of itself, to be drawn in and drawn out through its point of origin.

I also strain towards this in the poetry I read. And I find it, for example, in the repetition of that refrain of Yeats's, "Come build in the empty house of the stare," with its tone of supplication, its pivots of strength in the words "build" and "house," and its acknowledgment of dissolution in the word "empty." I find it also in the triangle of forces held in equilibrium by the triple rhyme of "fantasies" and "enmities" and "honey-bees," and in the sheer in-placeness of the whole poem as a given form within the language. Poetic form is both the ship and the anchor. It is at once a buoyancy and a holding, allowing for the simultaneous gratification of whatever is centrifugal and centripetal in mind and body. And it is by such means that Yeats's work does what the necessary poetry always does, which is to touch the base of our sympathetic nature while taking in at the same time the unsympathetic reality of the world to which that nature is constantly exposed. The form of the poem, in other words, is crucial to poetry's power to do the thing which always is and always will be to poetry's credit: the power to persuade the vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values, that our very solitudes and distresses are creditable, insofar as they, too, are an earnest of our veritable human being.

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Dimestore Dostoevsky

BY LUC SANTE

Savage Art: A Biography of Jim Thompson by Robert Polito

(Knopf, 543 pp., $30)

Jim Thompson, the most *noir* of all the *noir* writers, is another of those peculiarly American artists who beg the question of what we mean by "popular culture." He spent some four decades grinding out copy for true-crime and men's action pulps and producing a stream of paperbacks for the drugstore trade, and yet his best work is as personal, not to say obsessive and extreme, as anything issued by the high-hat word painters of his time. For that matter, his work was popular in the sense that it moved off the rack, but he did not long or consistently profit from it. Neither did he reap much recognition, except for the odd glimmers of interest and vague promises that fall under the heading of "cult status."

Now that he has been dead eighteen years, his career is at last in full swing. Prejudices have shifted, and readers today are more inclined to appreciate a writer who appears to be a desperado from nowhere who invented a species of jagged modernism in a vacuum, or possibly a borderline psychotic who vented himself in writing rather than by aiming a shotgun from a tower. Those are myths with a very contemporary cast to them. Still, as Robert Polito details in his excellent and painstaking biography, the man was not all that far from the image, his formation having taken place across a very broad canvas of low-level twentieth-century misery. Thompson was a pure product of America: his work's craziness is apt and often eloquent. His life, meanwhile, was a parade of dead ends, and makes for a numbing and often painful recital.

Thompson was born in 1906 in Anadarko, Oklahoma, in a room above the Caddo County jail. His father, James Thompson Sr., was the sheriff, a young man with a bright political future. A year later, however, the family skipped town in the middle of the night, a step ahead of the father's arrest on embezzlement charges. Thompson Sr. lammed it to Mexico, where he hid out for two years while his wife, son and two daughters went to live with her family in rural Nebraska. A pattern was set that would last a couple of decades. The elder Thompson was continually cooking up or inserting himself into schemes, usually involving oil speculation and often of dubious legality. Sometimes there would be a payoff and he would send for his family, setting them up in full bourgeois comfort. Then the thing would crash, homes would be seized or abandoned, the paterfamilias would try to save his skin, and it would be back to Nebraska for the rest.

The children were brought up in fits and starts, their education haphazard. Jim started work while sporadically attending high school, moving up from odd jobs at a burlesque house to night bellboy at the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth. The place may have been nominally respectable, but the teenager found that his job meant acting as a go-between for pimps and bootleggers. He was already an alcoholic, and that in combination with the hours and the stress came close to destroying his health. He was already a writer, too; he later claimed he sold his first sketch just before having to take a job. In any case, his high-school experience stretched out over seven years, unpunctuated by graduation. After collapsing from the combined effects of nervous exhaustion, alcoholism and tuberculosis, he lit out for the West Texas oilfields, where he worked as a roughneck in various capacities for two years. He drifted, starved, routinely risked his life, jungled up with hoboes, joined the Wobblies and hung around with such

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characters as "Haywire Mac" McClintock, who may or may not have written the IWW classics "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum" and "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," and Whitey Ford, an itinerant vaudevillian who went by the handle the "Duke of Paducah." These men eventually convinced him that he was wasting his youth and his brains, which would be much better served by education. Accordingly, he entered the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and was somehow talked into enrolling in the School of Agriculture.

As it happened, he was able to make profitable contacts there. The journal *Prairie Schooner* was published under university auspices, and there was considerable interest in folklore. Thompson's hard times found currency as research, and he published stories, poems, sketches and folkloric observations in a range of venues—his only detective story, for example, was serialized in the *Nebraska Farmer*. While a full-time student, Thompson worked at a bewildering variety of jobs, but before long he was married and a father, and the need for a regular paycheck caused him to drop out. He ran a small-town movie theater, which soon failed, and then, at the height of the Depression, he found himself riding the rails in search of work. Eventually he brought his family together with his mother and sisters in Fort Worth, and in his time off from a job as engine-starter at a hotel garage, he and his mother began collaborating on heavily embroidered pieces for the leading "fact-based" media of the day, headed by *True Detective*.

This was Thompson's first sustained and relatively remunerative line of literary production, but it ended when, after he had committed to paper a 40,000-word profile of an exemplary Oklahoma police chief, that paragon was jailed as the head of an auto theft ring, and Thompson was out of the promised $2,000 payment. He had moved his family to Oklahoma City for the duration of his work, but he wound up staying and becoming a member of the local branch of the Communist Party. He explicitly rejected Marx in his first published novel, in 1945, but continued to call himself a socialist for at least another decade. His books are not overtly political, but they are filled with mordant observations on authority and alienation, and, in the case of *Pop. 1280*, racism. Probably through party contacts, he was hired by the WPA Oklahoma Federal Writers' Project to work on the state guide and eventually became the Project's director. (One of his colleagues was a big-talking young radical, Louis L'Amour, who would one day become

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Ronald Reagan's favorite author.) The Writers' Project, inspiring though it may have been initially, was racked by petty griefs and controversies; by the time the guide was published, Thompson had been forced out and his work was edited to death.

Thompson's ill luck held. His first two books, completed under the sway of promises from publishers and encouragement from friends and colleagues, were rejected everywhere—he later claimed he threw the manuscript of the first, a novel, out the window of a bus. But he persisted, making his way to New York City, where he met up with friends from Oklahoma, including Woody Guthrie, through whom he found a radical publisher, Modern Age, willing to advance him $400 for a novel. He wrote the autobiographical *Now and on Earth* in five weeks in a room apparently equipped with little but a typewriter and a bottle of whiskey. At the time of its publication, in 1942, he was working as a timekeeper in an aircraft plant in San Diego. The book didn't sell, but in 1946 he got his second shot with the publication of *Heed the Thunder*, a grim Midwestern family saga in which he melodramatized the Nebraska side of his upbringing, endowing recognizable family members with various forms of sadism and insanity. It didn't sell, either. He slid further into alcoholism and self-destruction; he wrote whimsical color items for a daily newspaper; he took over a fiction seminar at UCLA; he got a job as an editor at a men's action pulp called *SAGA* and then at the moribund and terminally sleazy *Police Gazette*. His former colleagues recall carrying him out of bars. Along the way he wrote his first two crime novels, of which the first, *Nothing More than Murder*, stands up especially well, but little came of them.

Then his luck turned, however briefly. As Polito writes, "If Jim Thompson had died before the fall of 1952 ... his only memorial would have been a fistful of tantalizing footnotes.... [I]f he had died in the spring of 1954 his literary legacy would have remained essentially what it is today." Thompson met an editor named Arnold Hano at a paperback house called Lion Books—a corporate sibling of Marvel Comics—who engaged him to write books. The format was similar to what endures today in romance factories: the author was handed a synopsis, a word count and a tight deadline. Such strictures probably killed the flame in numerous hopeful writers but they brought Thompson to life. He wrote twelve books in nineteen months, and the tally includes all but two or three of his best. Somehow, the impersonal sausage-manufacture premise of the job caused Thompson to dive into his unconscious and to fashion what he retrieved into formally innovative fiction.

Such books as *The Killer Inside Me*, *A Hell of a Woman*, *The Nothing Man*, *Savage Night* and *After Dark, My Sweet* are harsh, sometimes barely endurable, and they are plainly made from the materials of Thompson's life: the parched landscapes of Texas and Oklahoma in the 1930s, his alcoholism and despair, his partnerships with tramps and swindlers and above all his relationship with his father. Thompson Sr. recurs in various increasingly wild guises in his son's work, memorably as the insidiously grinning, just-folks sadist Sheriff Lou Ford in *The Killer Inside Me*. Ford speaks in the first person, a mode Thompson had perfected in the profiles of Southwestern law-enforcers he wrote for true-crime pulps in the 1930s, and here milks for all its bitter irony the story of a small-town deputy sheriff whose job provides the perfect cover for his avocation as a serial killer.

Courtesy Jay Pearsall

JIM THOMPSON, "DIMESTORE DOSTOEVSKY"

> Dad had wanted me to be a doctor, but he was afraid to have me go away to school, so he'd done what he could for me at home. It used to irritate him, knowing what I had in my head, to hear me talking and acting like any rube around town. But, in time, when he realized how bad I had *the sickness*, he even encouraged me to do it. That's what I was going to be; I was going to have to live and get along with rubes. I wasn't ever going to have anything but some small, safe job, and I'd have to act accordingly. If Dad could have swung anything else that paid a living, I wouldn't even have been as much as a deputy sheriff.
>
> I fiddled around Dad's desk, working out a couple of problems in calculus just for the hell of it...

He continually expanded his repertoire of formal devices; there are narrations from beyond the grave, stories parceled out to as many as twelve equally unreliable witnesses, narratives that veer implacably between reality and hallucination—*A Hell of a Woman* ends with two pages of alternating lines of roman and italic type, accounts that contradict and undercut each other:

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my leg through the window. I straddled it, have to pay like the rest. Don't you want me *rocking back and forth, and it didn't take* to, darling. I nodded and she began unfas- *hardly any time at all. helen came to the door* tening and fumbling and then, then she low- *of the bathroom, and she began laughing,* ered the shears and then she was smiling *screaming. I threw myself out the window.* again and letting me see. There, she said, that's much better, isn't it? And, then, nice as I'd been, she started laughing. Screaming at me.

Reviewing *Savage Night, The New York Times*'s Anthony Voucher wrote that it "sheer[s] off from realism into a peculiar surrealist ending of sheer Guignol horror. Odd that a mass-consumption paperback should contain the most experimental writing I've seen in a suspense novel of late." Geoffrey O'Brien, who was instrumental in Thompson's posthumous revival, dubbed him the "Dime-store Dostoevsky"; one of his literary agents, interviewed by Polito, appropriately invoked Céline.

Thompson was not altogether alone in turning the 25-cent paperback into a forum for psychological spelunking and hand-hewn modernism. The postwar period also saw the best of David Goodis (see *Nightfall* and *Down There*, especially) and Charles Willeford (*Cockfighter*), among others. The misunderstood 1950s, for that matter, produced a singular array of tough, groundbreaking work in all genres under the auspices of popular entertainment, often particularly déclassé popular entertainment, from E. C. Comics to the films of Nicholas Ray and Samuel Fuller, to the 10,000 variations on rockabilly and rhythm and blues that are still being sifted and reclaimed. Thompson does stand as some kind of extreme, though. He made for the farthest Freudian limb nearly every time, and he was so tortured that the reader sometimes recoils and sometimes has to laugh. He was hardly uneducated, but his experimentation is entirely free of any academic glaze, so that he might seem to have cobbled it together in a swamp somewhere, appearing as the literary equivalent of an "outsider" artist. He is nearly a one-man definition of Manny Farber's concept of "termite art" ("termite-tapeworm-fungus-moss art ... goes always forward eating its own boundaries and ... leaves nothing in its path"). In literary-historical terms he is something of a missing link, the strand that ties together Céline and Dostoevsky and Faulkner and James M. Cain and Georges Bataille and Edward Anderson (*Thieves Like Us*). If he had never existed, someone, maybe the French, would have had to invent him.

Thompson's halcyon period at Lion ended when editors dispersed and the market tightened. After that he entered into a difficult partnership with Stanley Kubrick, perhaps writing all or most of *The Killing* and *Paths of Glory*, but with uncertain credit and remuneration. His last two decades (he died in 1977) were a succession of minor peaks and deep valleys. He wrote three more first-rate books (*The Grifters, The Getaway* and *Pop. 1280*, his apotheosis of his father as the monstrous Sheriff Nick Corey) and a fair amount of slag, and wrote dozens of samples and false starts at novels, at least a couple of which show startling promise but were abandoned due to lack of publishing interest. He was periodically subject to rediscovery, especially by the French (*Pop. 1280* was accorded the banner number 1000 in the *Série Noire* line) and by Hollywood (Sam Peckinpah, a staunch admirer, unfortunately made *The Getaway* into perhaps his most inert film). But he died nearly broke, feeling abused and shortchanged, predicting to his wife that he would be revived fifteen years after his passing, which was almost right.

Savage Art is a sobering document, sometimes almost as emotionally grueling as Thompson's own work. It is a scrupulous record of bad luck, bad timing, deprivation, self-abuse, rancor, nameless dread and often inexplicable resolve. As inspirational material for budding authors it should accomplish roughly what *All Quiet on the Western Front* did for the soldier's trade. Polito's research, amounting to detective work, is little short of mindboggling; simply tracking down Thompson's work on obscure regional trade journals and forgotten Canadian crime pulps was a task worthy of a skip-tracer. And Polito is a judicious, sympathetic, proportional biographer, who does not appoint himself a judge of behavior or make false claims for the sake of sensation, and who is able to present his material in its full cultural, historical and psychological context. *Savage Art* is more than just a life; it is a tour through the back alleys and hall bedrooms and drunk tanks of twentieth-century American culture. Its account of how one body of work came tortuously to exist silently evokes a million other creative spirits squelched by similar conditions. •

True Lies

BY CASS R. SUNSTEIN

Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification by Timur Kuran

(Harvard University Press, 432 pp., $45)

A decade ago it was scarcely imaginable that, by 1995, apartheid would be eliminated in South Africa and communism would be deposed in Eastern Europe, and that both of these things would happen peacefully. As a Hungarian said a year after the revolution, "Everything has become so strange. A year ago, the Communists ran the country. Today, you can't find a Communist anywhere." Nor would it have been easy to predict, in the United States, that the Republican Party would control both houses of Congress, that smoking would be banned on domestic flights, that recycling would be nearly everywhere, and that affirmative action would be under sharp attack, above all in California.

How can societies experience such dramatic reversals in such short periods? In his inventive and sometimes astonishing book, Timur Kuran offers an answer—one that bears not just on revolutionary movements, but also on feminism, conformity, cognitive dissonance, the moral majority, "outing" homosexuals, rationality, hate speech codes, Gorbachev, hippies and the caste system in India (all of which make prominent appearances in these pages). Kuran begins with a simple, even mundane point: social pressures can make people say that they want and believe something that they really don't want or believe. In a Communist regime, for example, almost everyone may talk about the enormous wisdom and virtue of the leaders of the Party, even though almost everyone thinks that the leaders are scoundrels and fools. In a small town in America, nearly everyone may attend and pray in church, even if many people are unsure whether they believe in God. The result of social pressures is to

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produce what Kuran calls "preference falsification," a phenomenon that occurs when you make an inaccurate public statement about your actual preferences (or beliefs). Falsified preferences might be described more simply, of course, as lies; but they are a distinctive, and distinctly interesting, kind of lies, with particular social implications.

The most powerful pressures can come from government, which may take your life or your property; but government is hardly the only source of preference falsification. The perceived opinions of others very much determine what people say and do, even in the most democratic of democracies. Thus Kuran emphasizes an important and often neglected fact: that private pressure can impair liberty, and obstacles to free speech and honest interchange often come from our fellow citizens. The desire to protect one's reputation, by declining to say things that other people think bizarre or offensive, is deeply rooted in human beings; and so Kuran finds a crucial distinction between a person's private preferences (what he actually wants) and his public preferences (what he says, in public, that he wants). Much of the interest of Kuran's book is owed to his insistence, unusual and refreshing among economists (of whom he is one), that people's choices, and even their desires, are not given and fixed, but are a function of social conditions, above all the pressures imposed by other people.

In this light we can see that "political correctness" is not an isolated phenomenon, limited to the left. It is, in fact, ubiquitous. In some places in contemporary America, it is risky to say that you are a devout Catholic; in other places, you endanger your reputation if you say that you voted Democrat. Whatever you think about Malcolm X, or developments in the Middle East, or the regulation of pornography, you will put your good name on the line among some prominent people if, on such topics, you insist on saying what you really think. The point is not limited to politics. Whatever you think of the dinner and the conversation at your employer's party, you are likely to say that you enjoyed the food and the company very much.

Kuran argues that preference falsification helps to guide, to stabilize, to constrain and to distort the existing social order. The Constitution's framers were entirely aware of the problem. In a step deplored by Jefferson, Madison closed the Constitutional Convention, so as to allow people to say what they really thought, without having to worry about public reactions. In the same way, secret ballots are designed to ensure that preference falsification does not happen; they allow people to vote as their conscience or their interest dictates. But if, as Justice Brandeis had it, "sunlight is the best of disinfectants," secret ballots are a mixed blessing, because it is sometimes valuable to hold judgments up for public scrutiny.

Kuran's real interest is not in moral evaluation, but in explaining individual and collective choices. To this end, he offers a simple economic framework based on three factors, which he describes (somewhat awkwardly) as intrinsic utility, reputational utility and expressive utility. A person's purely private preference is based on the intrinsic utility, to him, of the options under consideration. Some people really want to get rid of affirmative action or welfare programs, because they think that these are bad things, but their private preference may not be expressed publicly, because of the loss of reputational utility that would come from expressing it. The importance of reputational utility in a particular case depends on the extent of the risk to your reputation, and also on how much you care about your reputation. And people get what Kuran calls expressive utility from bringing their public statements into alignment with their private judgments. We all know people who hate to bow before social pressures; such people are willing to risk their reputation because what they especially hate is to speak or act in a way that does not reflect their true beliefs.

Kuran says that a person's choice of a public preference depends on these three variables, and hence that people's expressed views—their public preferences—are very much a product of what they think other people think. Kuran's psychology is crude and his basic intuition may appear obvious; and yet it casts light on many things, including the prospects for social stability and social change. As people's thoughts about other people's thoughts change, there is a shift in reputational incentives, and hence people's public preferences can shift: if you come to believe that there is a "silent majority" believing what you believe, you probably won't be silent for very long. For social change to occur, expectations are crucial, very much because they affect people's public preferences. And when people's perceptions of what other people think are shifting rapidly, there can be a bandwagon effect. These are all abstract points, but they bear on concrete events, including the fall of communism and apartheid and, more mundanely, changing norms involving smoking, discrimination, sneaker wear, the use of "Ms.," surprise best-sellers (and unread best-sellers) and recycling. In all of these cases, changing perceptions of other people's thoughts helped create a kind of cascade from one social state to another.

All this leaves an important question: Can public pressures affect private preferences as well as public preferences? Kuran thinks so, and he offers a subtle and intriguing explanation, focusing not on the concealment of private preferences but on their transformation. Let's start with individuals. Suppose that you tend to believe that women, like men, should be educated, and that everyone should have the chance to become literate regardless of gender. Suppose, too, that this belief is inconsistent with existing social pressures (as it is in many parts of the world). Eventually you may change your private belief, making it conform with those pressures. This is because it can be extremely frustrating, even distressing, to believe something that other people think implausible, offensive or stupid. In order to reduce cognitive dissonance, dissenters may bring their private preferences into line with perceived public opinion. And in this way people who are oppressed by the status quo can come to collaborate in their own oppression. Thus, in discussing the caste system in India, Kuran adduces evidence that "Hindu ideology has contributed to the untouchables' acceptance of their deprivations as fair, that it has made many treat their wretched existence as natural, and that it has facilitated their complicity in an order that degrades them."

But Kuran is interested not only in what happens with individual agents. He wants to explain also how certain private beliefs get lost or abandoned as the content of public information changes over time. If certain thoughts are "unthinkable"—in the sense that people who entertain them are seen as uncivil or immoral—they may eventually become "unthought," that is, they disappear altogether. And so social pressures can make certain ideas disappear from public discussion. As this happens, people become less conscious of the disadvantages of what is publicly favored and more conscious of the advantages. In the long run, private opinion itself moves against the thought that is publicly disfavored. If you have never heard that women should be educated equally with men, or that caste systems offend equality of opportunity, or that likes and dislikes are a function of social pressures, you may well not think of these things at all. Thus Kuran offers an account of how ideas can change across generations. In the end, the effects of public opinion on private preferences come from a collective

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process, in which millions of people affect one another's views through interdependent acts of knowledge and "preference falsification."

Kuran applies these basic ideas to three case studies: the fate of communism; the caste system in India; and the spread of affirmative action in the United States (which, in his view, was "unwanted"). The discussion of communism is a highlight of the book. Offering many vivid anecdotes, he shows that communism persisted not only, or not mostly, because of brute terror, but also because of a "pervasive culture of mendacity." People joined organizations they abhorred, followed orders they considered nonsensical, cheered speakers they despised and ostracized dissidents they greatly admired. How could this have been? Kuran shows that all this could not have been the consequence of terror—state resources were often far too limited for that—and that it was largely a product of widespread perceptions of what other people thought, or thought normal. Thus, for example, a unanimous vote of the Writers' Union denounced Boris Pasternak as an enemy of the Soviet Union for producing *Doctor Zhivago*, even though they widely admired the writer and his novel. There were countless similar examples. In the Soviet Union, of course, force was relevant; but preference falsification also played a role.

In some cases, preference falsification produces a situation of stability, but in other cases it is possible to get rapid, unforeseen, even unforeseeable shifts. Recall that public preferences are a function of what people think that other people think. It follows that when in Eastern Europe the level of apparent public opposition started to rise, people's public preferences changed quickly, as they came closer to their private preferences. Not only governments, but also policies, customs and fashions "can be abruptly abandoned when people who have helped sustain [them] suddenly discover a common desire for change." In fact, societies reach a tipping point when social pressures no longer support the status quo, but even undermine it. Eventually it is support for the status quo that produces reputational loss. (Think of recent civil rights movements for blacks and women.) Thus "a revolutionary bandwagon may help create the discontent that keeps it in motion. Switches from the government to the opposition may alert essentially content people to the government's failings; or they may make people who had been resigned to the status quo recognize the possibility of political change."

Kuran offers a similar explanation for the surprising longevity of the caste system in India. Within all castes, even lower ones, people are punished for expressing discontent and resentment. Above all, the threat of ostracism imposes great risks on anyone who showed disloyalty to his particular caste. It might seem that some group would break away from the system and create its own caste-free colony. But no such group can be created unless the individuals who would compose the group are willing to break away, and the threat of ostracism makes each potential member withhold participation until the project of breaking away seems likely to succeed. Since almost everyone sees this problem, no colony is formed. Taking issue with some common explanations, Kuran claims that the caste system is not economically efficient and that it does not maintain itself through any conspiracy from the top. It perpetuates itself because even subjugated castes uphold the system by punishing nonconformists.

Kuran thinks that the spread of affirmative action has also been made possible by preference falsification. Until recently, he says, affirmative action has not been subject to sustained social criticism, not least because those who express doubts have been treated as traitors to the cause or as racists. Kuran emphasizes in particular the lack of publicly expressed black opposition to affirmative action. In his view, this is a clear case of preference falsification, since blacks who challenge affirmative action risk ostracism from the civil rights community.

So much for Kuran's basic argument. A good test of a theory is whether it illuminates areas that it does not discuss. Measured in this way, Kuran's book is a terrific success. Consider the large effects of changing social norms and pressures with respect to smoking, the use of the term "African American," physical exercise, sexual harassment, statements of religious faith and diet. In all of these areas, we have seen bandwagon effects, even cascades, as people change both their acts and their statements in accordance with their perceptions about what other people think. Consider, too, the use, and the outcomes, of opinion polls. People may say they think something because of what they think other people think. This fact is yet another reason for concern about the pervasive use of opinion polls. Recent work even shows that the race of the interviewer much affects people's responses, a finding that supports Kuran's argument.

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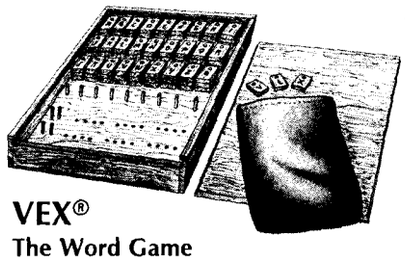

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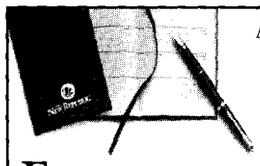

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social pressures, Kuran's discussion also illuminates an important mystery about the possibilities of law. There is an intriguing category of laws that are rarely enforced but that are seen to make a statement about what people think: mandatory seatbelt laws, laws requiring people to clean up after their dogs, laws banning littering, laws regulating places where people smoke. Whether or not they are enforced, such laws have large effects on people's perceptions of other people's attitudes; and in this way they affect behavior. The possibility of such laws also clears a greater space for democratic legitimation of new or emergent public convictions.

Of course an argument of this nature and scope raises many questions. Sometimes Kuran writes as if he is producing highly scientific accounts of stability and social change. But the underlying phenomena are diverse and unruly, and Kuran is only identifying a relevant factor in complex situations, rather than offering law-like generalizations about how societies change or stabilize themselves. A great virtue of his book is that it is much more systematic and rigorous than most discussions of these problems; but sometimes the analysis is too casual. Kuran seems a strong opponent of affirmative action, which is fine, but his own policy judgments make an excessive intrusion into his discussion of the underlying phenomenon. (He repeats the pervasive but utterly false claim that Martin Luther King Jr. was an opponent of race-conscious affirmative action policies. King strongly supported such policies.)

More generally, Kuran's treatment of the political dynamics of the affirmative action debate is too impressionistic and anecdotal. It is too simple to say that opponents of affirmative action have been shamed into silence. On the contrary, many of them, both white and black, have been vocal for a long time. At the same time it must be said that the attack on affirmative action, which is now very widespread, nicely confirms Kuran's point about the possible split between private and public preferences. A bandwagon effect is now occurring with great rapidity, to the point where, in many circles, people are under strong social pressure to oppose affirmative action policies, and those who defend those policies risk their reputations.

Kuran departs productively from traditional economists in refusing to see "preferences" as fixed and given. In his discussion of individual and social changes in preferences, he shows that they are very much a function of prevailing social norms. Unfortunately he mostly sticks with the economic tradition in seeing "preferences"—here "private preferences"—as the foundation of behavior. This oversimplifies reality. The term "preferences" includes many different things. It includes beliefs about facts as well as desires. And it includes emotional reactions, prominently involving shame (something with complex relations to "reputational utility"), as well as considered judgments about what is best; drives; whims; preferences about preferences ("I don't like opera, but I wish I did!"); crude self-interest; aspirations; and more. Some people even like to defy convention and see "reputational cost" as a great benefit, an important phenomenon to which Kuran pays too little attention.

From the psychological point of view, then, Kuran's division of the wellsprings of action into "private" preferences and "public" preferences is too crude. And there is a related problem. Kuran writes as if people make internal judgments that are purely "private." These are, in his view, "genuine desires." In his framework, these private judgments are compromised by external forces that lead to a statement about preferences that is "false." In a way, this is right and illuminating; but it is too simple. People's most private "preferences" are a product of a great many things, including public forces of various kinds. The privately held views of the racist may be a product of familial or local attitudes, and not in any

The Ice-Storm

In Memory of Bernie Fields

Dear Robert, Thank you for trying to rig
A conduit for me—linkage, blank, bandage, this
Contraption made of grammar, with "I" for "he":

•

Words are no clumsier than what we use to trace
Tangled-up branches on the family tree
Of some culprit virus stowed in the rootclot.

•

Voice not you nor I, I not what I was or am,
You not what you are or were—poker crony,
Acquiantance, seeking what germ strewn in the sodcloud?

•

Flailing for instructive failure. "*That's life,*"
Muttered—not an adage and not an answer
To *What is life?* (Not my field, though nearly.)

•

What is a life?: that is the better question,
As I'd have said even before the cancer
Churned me across dark water to this other side:

•

No opalescent temple, no sages fringed and sidelocked,
No smoking field where a hero craves a cottage.
No void no terraces no planisphere. Nothing you know.

•

The day that Leslie read those poems to me
He wasn't sure I was listening, dark shape
Unspeaking swollen on the pillows. Tell him I was.

•

What is a life? A specimen, or a kind?
A savage craving or civil obituary
Architecture of birth, attachment, achievement?—

•

The Times rehearsing with mediated, Roman
Sweetness the names of my near kin, so cherished
In the molten hold of attachment, sweet cooling lava;

•

Or honey of ink aggrandizing, gratifying
("...one of the great virologists of the century"),
Meaning: a success, like everybody else.

•

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deep sense genuine; the public taboo on public expressions of racism may be a good corrective, rather than an artificial, external intrusion onto something that deserves to be called "true." If my "private" judgment is that homosexuality is an illness, or that welfare benefits should not be reduced, or that the budget deficit is not a serious problem, I am probably reacting to an array of publicly asserted facts and values. Few of us have made fully independent judgments about public policy. Certainly our "private preferences" do not predate social interaction.

In fact, what Kuran sees as "public preferences" may be especially authentic. What people say in public can be a function of what they believe to be right or fair, whereas their "private preferences" may, even to them, seem selfish or invidious. A racist may have a "private preference" for a system of racial hierarchy, but some racists are ashamed of their racism, and hence their "public preferences" capture what, in a sense, they really think or think right. Most "preferences" are a function of the context in which they are expressed, and so Kuran's suggestion that private preferences are "true" and public preferences "false" is unconvincing. Sometimes the public preferences are authentic in the sense that they correspond to what people think, on reflection, to be best.

Kuran raises, but does not answer, another pressing question: Is "preference falsification" a good thing or a bad thing? Kuran's examples suggest that it is very bad; but as he is aware, no such judgment would make sense. For one thing, the answer turns partly on the content of the relevant social pressures. What sorts of "preferences" are being stigmatized? In most places, people are likely to feel under a good deal of pressure not to defend Hitler. That pressure should not be much mourned; it is a way of reflecting human learning and inculcating human decency (and also of economizing on discussion). By contrast, something has gone wrong if reasonable or good moral judgments cannot be expressed publicly, as, for example, in nations in Eastern Europe in which one could not criticize communism, or in the many parts of many nations where one cannot endorse feminism (consider the often-heard phrase, "I'm not a feminist, but . . .").

In this way, the social pressures that produce "preference falsification" should be evaluated partly by asking about substance: what sorts of things are causing reputational losses? But social pressures should not be evaluated only in these terms. It is most unfortunate if such pressures prevent people from saying and testing what they actually think, because a barrier to honest statements is an insult to people's autonomy, and because the public's capacity for deliberation and self-criticism will be severely undermined if a social taboo is placed on dissenting views. Too often, discussion is made impossible when social pressures make people act and talk as if they agree, when they do not.

We are living in a period in which an abstraction called "government" is under widespread attack and little attention is given to the effects of social pressures on human freedom and well-being. As Kuran shows, those pressures can make people say and do things that they abhor. And since social pressures can affect the development of preferences, government may have to act in order to allow people to overcome corrosive social pressures; consider recent official action with respect to cigarette smoking, unsafe sex, sexual harassment, environmentally irresponsible behavior, and even the failure to buckle seatbelts. It is not the least virtue of Kuran's book that it offers ample evidence that social pressures can be serious obstacles to liberty, and that in the face of such obstacles governmental efforts might actually promote freedom.

CASS R. SUNSTEIN is the author of *Legal Reasoning and Political Conflict*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

When you hear the *Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'may rabah*
When the beloved one hurling her handful of earth
Staggers at the brink as if buffetted by wind

•

When the congregation responds *Y'hay sh-may*
rabah m'varah, l'olam ul'olmay olmaya—it's
Now my mouth is the flared bell of a silver horn

•

Now my eyes lidded by the wings of a dragonfly look
Inward for billions of miles, Now my feet are two
Crystals that leave no prints. O the poker game!

•

Closed system, boyish ritual first Sunday evening
Of the month, more innocent than boyish, none smoking, few
Cursing, never more than a second beer, game, lightness

•

Wanting deeply to win, we gather to laugh
At that wanting, stakes high enough to terrify our
Selves at fourteen, low enough to parody that fear.

•

My brain a clay vessel my fingers unlit candles
My lights a cello, cabalistic rhythms of Spade
Heart Club Diamond royalty in Gipsy embroidery.

•

Permission, remission, the Washington AIDS job
My doctors said was too great a risk for me. Now
My heart is fluted amber, umbrage of texts, When

•

Thou cut down thy harvest in the field, and hast forgot
A sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to
Fetch it, for it will be for the stranger,

•

The fatherless and the widow, Remember thou
Lived a bondsman in the land of Egypt. *Yisgadal*
V'yiskadash trembling life, crystal or viral,

•

Lifespan of the ice-storm the week after I died
That lasted for three days: separate lucid twigs
Still coated with chrism each morning, gutters

•

Still filigreed with leaf-ice, diamonded branches
Bowed heavy with light, at dusk still rosy,
Mysterious light melted to a sheen by morning

ROBERT PINSKY

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

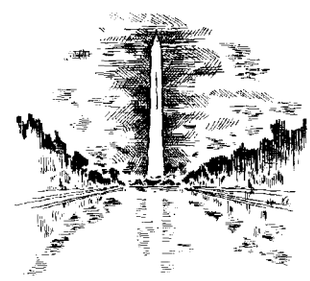
Angel food

WHAT IS IT ABOUT FILM THAT turns so many of its critics into babies? Most of them act as if they are grateful simply for the existence of this wonderful twentieth-century toy that moves and talks and is in every way lifelike. Take the generally distinguished Stanley Crouch's recent book of essays, *The All-American Skin Game.* His essay about Quentin Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction* is a victim of the cinéaste's infantilism. Tarantino has a genuinely literary ear for how innately comical most speech is—because it is full of repetition, senseless idioms, unsyntactical lapses, etc. Like Dickens, he has noticed that there is something abstract about speech at speed; that speech is a nursery game. On the other hand, only in this age could an artist as talented as Tarantino produce artworks so entirely vacuous, so entirely stripped of politics, metaphysics or moral interest.

ONE MIGHT EXPECT CROUCH, the scourge of low culture, to say something like this. Not at all. Crouch lies down and lets Tarantino break him into superlatives. Tarantino has "a large and subtle talent ... the human nuances and surprises in the writing ... expressive of a nearly astonishing talent." One "cannot be too impressed" by what Tarantino has accomplished. Finally, he breaks down and thanks the film stars simply for turning up to the party: "an almost endless line of high points in varied styles of contemporary film acting, which includes the work of Tim Roth, Amanda Plummer, Eric Stoltz, Rosanna Arquette...." This, from a critic who elsewhere mocks Prince as "a Minneapolis vulgarian."

I WAS ALERT TO CROUCH'S SWERVE from customary intelligence only because a few days before reading his essay, I had gone to see a very bad and fraudulent film called *Leaving Las Vegas.* In it, an alcoholic, played by Nicholas Cage, abandons his life in L.A. and heads for Las Vegas. Improbably, he meets there a beautiful prostitute (Elizabeth Shue) who falls in love with him and takes him in. He is as bemused as the audience by this luck. Unlike the audience, he is moved to "poetry": "What are you," he asks Shue, "some kind of angel visiting me from one of my drunk fantasies?" (Audience—if composed of intelligent and feeling citizens—sniggers into its sleeve.) Angel and sinner know that they do not have long. Film ends with sinner dying, after the couple manage a bout of redemptive sex.

THE FILM IS SENTIMENTAL, HAZY, genteel and utterly faked. So I was curious to see what critics had made of it. Well, there had been a veritable blizzard of encomia. Janet Maslin, in *The New York Times,* called it "searing" and "pitilessly well-observed." *The Washington Post* commended the film's "unflinching" vision. In *The New Yorker,* Terrence Rafferty praised the film's invigorating "honesty." David Denby, in *New York* magazine, spasmed breathlessly: "as close as the movies have ever come to the somber exaltation of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde.*" He ended his review giddy on his own helium: "as close as we get to art in the American cinema of the '90s."



BELIEVE ME, THIS IS NOT VERY close. *Leaving Las Vegas* is based on a novel of the same name by John O'Brien. The book was treated reverently by most film critics because O'Brien killed himself in 1994. Terrence Rafferty opined that the film's screenplay was "faithful to the bracingly objective tone of its source, a 1990 novel that was the first and last book by a talented young writer...." O'Brien was young, but he was not talented, and he was not a writer. Suicides can write bad books, too, and O'Brien's novel is one of the very worst. It is pseudo-solemn, opaque, lumbering, unwittingly hilarious and vaguely subliterate. Here is O'Brien describing Sera, the Las Vegas hooker: "Paying for her and using her, there are always men available. The tricks turn to her, for she glistens with the appealing inaccessibility of the always introspective. They turn to the buyable quench—no lie, a promise in the panties—and she plays out the bargain with the competence of one consistently able to hit well the mark ... ready in an instant to fall into the groove and take command without missing a beat. Her tricks go away quietly, their burden of dissatisfaction lessened sufficiently to fulfill the terms of any implied agreement that may have been struck."

HIT WELL THE MARK, EH? THE film is a little better than this, but not much. It has the same vulgarity: cliché posing as profundity. Far from being "unflinching" or "searingly honest," it swaddles degradation in fall colors. When Cage moves into Shue's apartment, he warns her that he will be difficult to live with, that he will vomit, knock things over, and so on. But we see almost nothing of the lived *dailiness* of alcoholism. Instead, a suspiciously healthy-looking Cage rolls around on the floor near the fridge, swigs vodka from the bottle while taking a shower and gets thrown out of motels and casinos. The film's notion of drunkenness is at once cartoonish and genteel: we see Cage hunched over a lavatory bowl, but we are "spared" his vomit. There is no lucidity, no precision. It is *Pretty Woman* with vodka.

NONE OF THIS would matter very much if this were just an ordinary film that had been somewhat overpraised. But *Leaving Las Vegas* is not simply a bad film; it is a bad film subtly impersonating a good one. It perpetrates a fraud. As Nabokov suggested in his biography of Gogol, this is the most dangerous category of contemporary artwork (he called it *poshlust,* the Russian for kitsch that thinks it is not). Real trash, said Nabokov, is often wholesome and transparent. *Poshlust,* on the other hand, "is especially vigorous and vicious when the sham is *not* obvious and when the values it mimics are considered, rightly or wrongly, to belong to the very highest level of art, thought or emotion."

WHAT WE HAVE, IN THE RECEPTION to *Leaving Las Vegas,* is a category mistake. Since art is about life, this mistake poisons the way we apprehend both other artworks and life. When Stanley Crouch ascribes moral interest to a film that lacks it, he misdescribes not just the film, but moral interest itself. People, presumably, watch *Leaving Las Vegas* and conclude that this is how high art conducts itself—tears, almost-pathos, the "authenticity" of a sad ending. Little wonder, then, that the same people, when faced with something true, like *King Lear,* or a John Cassavetes film (*there* is where you will see an honest gaze at the degradations of alcohol), or a Chekhov story, will leave these artworks bored, restless and unfulfilled. That is bad enough, for art has been spoiled for such people. But life has been spoiled, too. Art may tutor our sensibilities. And what if this particular tutorial encourages us to feel that this is how to see life itself?

JAMES WOOD

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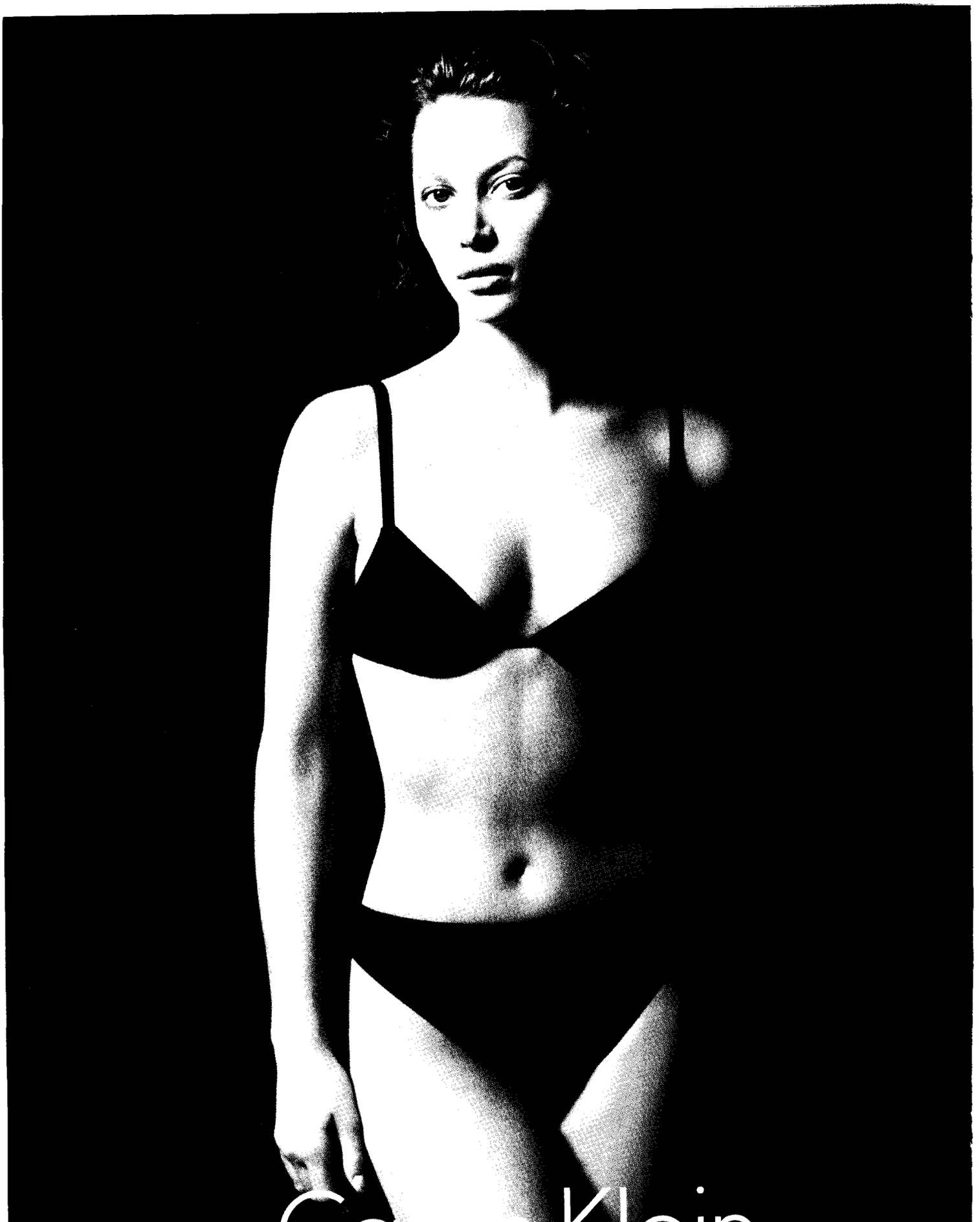

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